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NUTTIE'S FATHER



NUTTIE'S FATHER

BY

CHARLOTTE M. YONGE

AUTHOR OF 'THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE,' 'UNKNOWN TO HISTORY,' ETC.

VOL. II.

London

MACMILLAN AND CO.

1885

Printed by R. & R. CLARK, Edinburgh.

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Dorothy Paine

CHAPTER I.

URSULA'S RECEPTION.

'Thy wish was father, Harry, to that thought.'—SHAKESPEARE.

45
IT was at half-past seven o'clock that Ursula Egremont's cab stopped at St. Ambrose's Road. She had missed the express train, and had to come on by a stopping one. But here at last she was, with eyes even by gaslight full of loving recognition, a hand full of her cab-fare, a heart full of throbbing hope and fear, a voice full of anxiety, as she inquired of the astonished servant, 'Louisa, Louisa, how is Aunt Ursel!' and, without awaiting the reply, she opened the adjoining door. There sat, with their evening meal on the table, not only Mary Nugent, but Miss Headworth herself.

Nuttie rushed at her, and there was an incoherency of exclamations, the first thing that made itself clear to the senses of the traveller being, 'Ill, my dear? No such thing! Only I had a bad cold, and Mary here is only too careful of me.'

'But Mark said you had bronchitis.'

‘What could have put that into his head? He did not write it, surely?’

‘He wrote it to Annaple Ruthven, and she told Blanche.’

‘Oh!’ and Mary Nugent’s tone was rather nettling.

‘And then it was such a terrible time since we had heard anything,’ added Nuttie, on the defensive.

‘Did not your mother get my letter?’ said Miss Headworth. ‘I wrote to her at—what’s the name of that place? I hope I addressed it right.’

‘Oh, but I was not there. I didn’t go with them.’

‘Ah yes, I remember. Then did not she send you?’

‘No, I came off this morning. I heard this yesterday evening, and I determined that nothing should stop me if there was no news by the post.’

‘Dear child! But will your father not be displeased?’ said Miss Headworth.

‘He hasn’t any right to object,’ cried Nuttie, with flashing eyes and a look that made Miss Nugent anxious; but at the moment there could be little thought save of welcome to the warm-hearted girl. Louisa was already brewing fresh tea, and extemporising additions to the meal, and Nuttie was explaining how she hoped to have arrived a couple of hours sooner.

‘By the bye, I meant to have written to mother for her to have it to-morrow before leaving Waldicotes. Is there time?’

No, the pillar at hand was cleared at seven, and

the regular post-office could not be reached in time ; so they satisfied themselves with the knowledge that Mrs. Egremont must have had Aunt Ursel's cheerful letter, and Mary recommended telegraphing to the Canon the first thing in the morning. Then they gave themselves up to enjoyment.

‘At any rate, I’m here,’ said Nuttie, ‘and I’ll make the most of it.’

And her handsome furs were laid aside, and her boots taken off, and she resigned herself to absolute ease and luxury, while Mary poured out the tea, and her aunt heaped her plate with eggs and rashers ‘such as one doesn’t get anywhere else,’ said Nuttie, declaring herself quite voracious, while her aunt fondly admired her growth and improvement, and she inquired into the cold, not quite gone yet ; and there were speculations over what Mark could have got into his head. Mary remembered having met him coming to call, and having told him that she had persuaded Miss Headworth to keep her bed because her colds were apt to be severe, and it was agreed to lay the exaggeration at the door of the lovers and Blanche. Miss Headworth laughed, and said she ought to be flattered that an old woman’s sore throat should be thought worthy of mention by a fine young gentleman like Mr. Mark. ‘A very good young man he is,’ she added. ‘You would never have thought how kind he is in coming in here to tell me everything he hears about your dear mother, Nuttie?’

‘He makes himself very useful while Mr. Dutton

is away,' added Mary, 'taking his young men's class and all.'

'Oh! is Mr. Dutton away?'

'Yes; he has had to be in London a great deal of late. I am afraid he may have to live there altogether.'

'What a grievous pity!'

'He won't be anywhere without doing good,' said Miss Headworth, 'but I sometimes wish we had his cool good sense here.'

'And how is Mr. Spyers,' asked Nuttie. She felt shy of asking for Gerard Godfrey, or perhaps she thought she ought to be shy of his name, and kept hoping that it would come in naturally.

'Mr. Spyers is very well. Very busy of course, and very much delighted with your mother's gifts to the church. All her own work, isn't it, Nuttie?'

'Yes; every bit. She does lots of embroidery and work of all kinds when she is waiting for *him* or sitting with *him*, and luckily it has never occurred to him to ask what it is for.'

The two ladies knew well what was meant by *him*, but they would not pursue the subject, and proceeded to put Nuttie *au courant* with St. Ambrose affairs—how last year's mission had produced apparently an immense effect in the town, and how the improvement had been ebbing ever since, but had left various individual gains, and stirred up more than one good person who had hitherto thought it enough to save one's own soul and let other people alone; how Mr. Spyers was

endeavouring to bind people together in a guild; how a violent gust of temperance orators had come down upon the place, and altogether fascinated and carried away Gerard Godfrey.

There was his name at last, and Nuttie was rather gratified to feel herself blushing as she asked, 'Ah! poor Gerard—how is he?'

'As good and sincere as ever,' said Miss Nugent, 'but not much wiser. He is so excitable and vehement.'

'Yes,' said Miss Headworth. 'I don't understand the kind of thing. In my time a steady young clerk used to be contented after hours with playing at cricket in the summer, or learning the flute in the winter—and a great nuisance it was sometimes, but now Gerard must get himself made a sort of half clergyman.'

'A reader,' suggested Mary.

'Minor orders. Oh, how delightful!' cried Nuttie.

'People don't half understand it,' added Miss Headworth. 'Mrs. Jeffreys will have it that he is no better than a Jesuit, and really I did not know what to say, for he talked to me by the hour about his being an external brother to something.'

'Not to the Jesuits, certainly,' said Nuttie.

'Yes, I told her that; but she thinks all monks are Jesuits, you know, and that all brothers are monks; and he does wear his cassock—his choir cassock, I mean—when he has his service in the iron room at the sandpits. And now he has taken up temperance,

and flies about giving the pledge, and wanting one to wear bits of blue ribbon. I told him I never did take, and never had taken, more than a little hot wine and water when I had a cold, and I couldn't see what good it would do to George Jenkins and the poor fellows at the Spread Eagle if I took ever so many vows.'

'There's a regular blue-ribbon fever set in,' said Miss Nugent. 'Gerard told me I was supporting the cause of intemperance yesterday because I was so wicked as to carry the rest of your bottle of port, Miss Headworth, to poor Anne Crake.'

'Well! he is a dear boy, and youth wouldn't be youth if it were not sometimes rather foolish,' said Miss Headworth, 'and it is better it should be for good than evil.'

'Eager in a cause and not for selfishness,' said Mary. 'Poor Gerard, I wonder where he will be safely landed!'

So did Nuttie, who had a secret flattering faith in being the cause of all the poor young fellow's aberrations, and was conscious of having begun the second volume of her life's novel. She went to bed in the elated frame of mind proper to a heroine. There was a shade over all in the absence of dear old Mrs. Nugent, and in Mary's deep mourning; but there is more tenderness than poignancy in sorrow for shocks of corn gathered in full season, and all was cheerful about her.

She had quite a triumph the next day, as old friends dropped in for the chance of seeing her. The least agreeable encounter was that with Mark, who came

in on his way to the office, having just received by the second post a letter from his father inquiring into Miss Headworth's state. He met Nuttie in the vestibule, with her hat on, and in a great hurry, as she wanted to walk with Mary to the School of Art, Gerard Godfrey accompanying them as far as the office; and she did not at all like the being called to account, and asked what could have possessed her to take alarm.

‘Why, you wrote yourself!’

‘I!’

‘To Annaple Ruthven.’

‘What am I supposed to have written?’

‘That Aunt Ursel was very ill with bronchitis.’

‘I’ll be bound that Miss Ruthven said no such thing. You don’t pretend that you heard it from herself?’

‘No; but Blanche did.’

‘Blanche! Oh, that accounts for it! Though I should have thought you knew Blanche by this time.’

‘But what did you say?’

‘I believe I said I couldn’t get a knitting pattern Miss Headworth was to send Lady Ronnisglen because she was in bed with a cold. What you and Blanche could contrive to make of a simple thing like that——’

‘And Annaple!’

‘Well,’ but checking himself with a smile, ‘we will not fight about that. I only hope it has not brought you into an awkward scrape, Nuttie.’

‘I can’t help that,’ she answered with her head rather high.

'You have written and explained?' he said anxiously.

'To my mother, of course.'

'If I were you,' he said, lowering his voice, 'I should write or send a special message to your father.'

'I can't see why. It was a mistake.'

'Yours was a strong measure, and he won't like it. Be advised, Nuttie. Recollect your mother. The best way would be to go home at once. I could get a day to take you—if you would start this afternoon.'

'Thank you; I'm not going back till I hear,' she said proudly.

Time being up, Mark took his leave hastily, and as he shut the door, Nuttie uttered half aloud the words she had scarcely repressed, 'No, I thank you, Mr. Mark, I am not going back like a dog in a string.'

'What, was that what he expected of you?' said Gerard Godfrey, whom she had not intended to hear her, but who had come out of the sitting-room on the sounds of departure.

'He said he would take me home if I could go at once.'

'Wouldn't he have liked it!' exclaimed Gerard.

'It might be the best way,' said Miss Nugent, who had followed young Godfrey.

'Now, Miss Mary,' cried Nuttie, 'as if I could shorten my holiday now that I have it.'

'And I don't see what business he had to call you to account,' said Gerard. 'A stuck-up fellow.'

'Of course all the Egremonts are set against my being here,' said Nuttie.

'I thought the Canon offered to bring you last year,' said Mary gently.

'Oh, that was only to Monks Horton! It would have been simply tantalising.'

'Lady Kirkaldy is an excellent person,' said Miss Nugent.

'Is she at home now?' asked Ursula.

'Coming next week they tell me,' said Gerard. 'He—your cousin—will always be loafing up there now, giving up all that he had undertaken, I suppose.'

'Not very likely,' said Mary quietly.

'It is a mere Scottish anti-church influence,' said Gerard, turning round at the swing-door of his office. 'Why else will Egremont not take the pledge?'

Wherewith he disappeared, blue ribbon and all, while Mary smiled, though she was vexed; and Nuttie observed, 'Poor Gerard; but I can't see why he should be jealous of Mark *now*.'

Mary did not choose to understand what Nuttie implied in her simplicity, and made answer, 'He is rather blue ribbon mad. Besides, I am afraid the fact of being a "swell" does not conduce to your cousin's popularity among the clerks.'

'Surely he does not give himself airs,' said Ursula, her family feelings awaking.

'No; but I fancy he is rather reserved.'

'What's this about giving up what he has undertaken? What is it?'

‘When Mr. Dutton went to London, he asked Mark to take his Sunday afternoons with the big lads. He thought they wanted some one with more resources and variety than there is in poor Gerard, who didn’t at all like being passed over.’

‘I never should have thought it of Mark. He never dreamt of teaching anybody at home.’

‘Very likely not, but there is an atmosphere at St. Ambrose’s.’

‘And oh, how glad I am to be in it! I wonder how long they will let me stay! The dear little mother will try to get me a Sunday here, if she dares. Indeed, I can’t hear before Saturday, and then there would hardly be time to get home! Oh, that’s jolly! I’ll go to the nursery gardens, and get *such* flowers for the vases!’

Saturday brought Nuttie a letter, but not from her mother—

‘MY DEAR URSULA—I write because we are anxious to keep your mother as quiet as possible. It was a serious shock to her to find that you had left home, and she naturally supposed that Miss Headworth was in great danger. Your father was greatly displeased, and she has been much overcome, and very unwell; but we hope by keeping her perfectly quiet that worse consequences may be prevented. Your father desires you to remain where you are for the present, as he will not have her disturbed again. Your mother sends her love both to you and to your aunt, and desires me to say that she will write in a day or two, and that she thinks you had better not come back till she is better and your father’s vexation has diminished.

‘I wish you had informed us of your intentions, as then we could have ascertained the grounds of the report that terrified you so strangely.—I remain your affectionate aunt,
JANE M. EGREMONT.’

‘Poor mother! he has been sneering at us all in his dreadful cynical way, and knocked her up into one of her awful headaches,’ said Nuttie, who felt extremely angered by the grave tone of rebuke in the letter, and tossed it over to her aunt without absolutely reading it all. Miss Headworth was a good deal distressed, and anxious to know what Mrs. William Egremont meant; but Nuttie positively declared, ‘Oh, it is her headaches! You know she always had them more or less, and they have grown a great deal worse since she has taken to sitting in that horrid, stuffy, perfumy, cigar-ry room, and doesn’t take half exercise enough.’

And when Miss Headworth showed herself much concerned about the state of things, Nuttie coaxed her, and declared that she should fancy herself unwelcome, and have to go and beg a lodging somewhere instead of enjoying her reprieve. And Aunt Ursel was far less impervious to coaxing than she used to be when she was the responsible head of a boarding house. She did most thoroughly enjoy the affection of her great niece, and could not persuade herself to be angry with her, especially when the girl looked up smiling and said, ‘If the worst came to the worst and he did disinherit me, the thing would only right itself. I always meant to give it back to Mark.’

No great aunt in the world could fail to admire the

generous spirit of the girl who came back from the great world of luxury, so loving and happy in her humble surroundings. The only sighs were for poor Alice, in the hands of a man of whom Miss Headworth knew so much evil. If she were not wretched and a victim—and Nuttie did not think her such—she must surely be getting spoilt and worldly. Her daughter implied fears of this kind, yet who could read her letters and think so?

Nuttie was fortunately too much in awe of the Canoness to write all the pertnesses that tingled at her fingers' ends, and she sent a proper and fairly meek letter, intimating, however, that she was only too happy to remain at Micklethwayte.

It was two or three days more before she heard again.

‘MY OWN DEAR CHILD—They have let me write at last, and I can say how much I like to think of your nestling up to dear Aunt Ursel, and how glad I am to find that she was well enough to enjoy you. It is almost like being there to hear of you, and the only thing that grieves me is that your father was very much vexed at your setting off in that sudden way, and at my being so foolish about it. His eyes have been very bad, and he missed me sadly while I was laid up. We are neither of us very strong, and we think—if Aunt Ursel and Mary can keep you for a little longer—it will be better for you to stay on with them, as it might be as dreary for you as it was last winter, especially as the Rectory folk will soon be going into residence. I will write to them about it and persuade them to take something for your board, so as to make it easy

for them. And then you can have a fire in your room ; you must not leave it off now you are used to it. My dear, I wish you would write a little apology to your father. I ought not to conceal that he is really very angry, and I think it would be well if you expressed some regret, or if you cannot truthfully do that, asked his pardon for your impetuosity ; for you know he cannot be expected to realise all that dear Aunt Ursel is to us. You cannot think how kind your Aunt Jane has been to me ; I did not think she could have been so tender. This is the first letter I ever had to write to you, my own dear child. I miss you every moment, but after all it is better you should be away till your father has overlooked this hurried expedition of yours. I am sure he would if you wrote him a real nice letter, telling how you were really frightened, and that it was not a mere excuse. Pray do, and then you can come back to your loving little mother.

‘A. E.’

‘As if I would or could,’ quoth Nuttie to herself. ‘Apologise to him indeed, for loving the aunt who toiled for us when he deserted us. Poor little mother, she can’t really expect it of me. Indeed, I don’t think she quite knows what she wants, or whether she likes me to be here or at Bridgefield ! My belief is that he bullies her less when I am out of the way, because she just gives way to him, and does not assert any principle. I’ve tried to back her up, and it is of no use, and I am sure I don’t want such a winter as the last. So I am much better here ; and as to begging pardon, when I have done nothing wrong, I am sure I won’t, to please anybody. I shall tell her that she ought to know me better than to expect it !’

But Nuttie did not show the letter either to Aunt Ursel or Mary Nugent; nor did she see that in which Alice had satisfied them that it might be better that her daughter should pay them a long visit, while Mr. Egremont's health required constant attendance, and the Canon's family were at Redcastle. And as her husband was always open-handed, she could make Ursula's stay with them advantageous to their slender means, without hurting their feelings.

She told them as much as she could, but there was more that no living creature might know, namely, the advantage that Gregorio had gained over that battlefield, his master, during her days of illness. The first cold weather had brought on pain, and anger and anxiety, nervous excitement and sleeplessness, which the valet had taken upon him to calm with a narcotic under a new name that at first deceived her till she traced its effects, and inquired of Dr. Hammond about it. Unwillingly, on her account, he enlightened her, and showed her that, though the last year's care had done much to loosen the bonds of the subtle and alluring habit, yet that any resumption of it tended to plunge its victim into the fatal condition of the confirmed opium-eater, giving her every hope at the same time that this propensity might be entirely shaken off, and that the improvement in Mr. Egremont's health and habits which had set in might be confirmed, and raise him above the inclination.

Could she have been rid of Gregorio, she would have felt almost sure of victory; but as it was, she

believed the man absolutely meant to baffle her, partly out of a spiteful rivalry, partly because his master's torpid indolence could be used to his own advantage. She was absolutely certain that his sneering tone of remark made her husband doubly disinclined to let any religious book be near, or to permit her to draw him to any Sunday observance.

The battle must be fought out alone. The gentle woman could have no earthly helper in the struggle. The Canon and Mark, the only persons who could have given her the slightest aid, were both at a distance, even if her loyal heart could have brooked confession to them, and she only hoped that Nuttie would never know of it. Only aid from above could be with her in the daily, hourly effort of cheerfulness, patience, and all the resources of feminine affection, to avert the temptation; and she well knew that the presence of the ardent, unsubdued, opinionative girl would, alas, only double the difficulties. So she acquiesced, at least for the present, in Nuttie's grand achievement of having broken away from all the wealth and luxury of Bridgefield to return to her simple home and good old aunt. Mark was a good deal vexed, but Nuttie did not care about that, attributing this displeasure to Egremont clanship; Mary Nugent was doubtful and anxious, and thought it her duty to reconcile herself to her father; but Miss Headworth, who, be it remembered, had reason to have the worst impressions of Mr. Egremont, rejoiced in her young niece having escaped from him for the time, and only

sighed over the impossibility of Alice's doing the same. And when Nuttie described, as she constantly did, the various pleasures she had enjoyed during the past year, the good old lady secretly viewed her as a noble Christian heroine for resigning all this in favour of the quiet little home at Micklethwayte, though reticent before her, and discussed her excellence whenever she was alone with Mary.

Nor would Miss Nugent vex her with contradictions or hints that what Nuttie was giving up at present might be a dull house, with her mother engrossed by an irritable semi-invalid, and the few gaieties to be enjoyed by the help of the Canon's family at Redcastle. She did ask the girl whether Mrs. Egremont, being avowedly not quite well, might not need her assistance; but Nuttie vehemently disavowed being of any possible use to her father; he never let her read to him! oh no! he called her music schoolgirly, a mere infliction; he never spoke to her if he could help it, and then it was always with a sort of sneer; she believed he could not bear the sight of her, and was ashamed of it, as well he might be! For Mrs. Houghton's disclosures had rankled ever since within her, and had been confirmed by her aunt.

'But that is very sad,' said Mary. 'I am so sorry for you. Ought you not to try hard to conquer his distaste?'

'I—why, he cares for nothing good!'

'Nay,' smiling. 'Not for your mother?'

'Oh! She's pretty, you know; besides, she makes

herself a regular slave to him, and truckles to him in everything, as I could never do.'

'Perhaps she is overcoming evil with good.'

'I am afraid it is more like being overcome of evil. No, no, dear Miss Mary, don't be shocked. The dear little mother never would be anything but good in her own sweet self, but it is her nature not to stand up for anything, you know. She seems to me just like a Christian woman that has been obliged to marry some Paynim knight. And it perfectly provokes me to see her quite gratified at his notice, and ready to sacrifice anything to him, now I know how he treated her. If I had been in her place, I wouldn't have gone back to him; no, not if he had been ready to crown me after I was dead, like Iñes de Castro.'

'I don't know that you would have had much choice in that case.'

'My very ghost would have rebelled,' said Nuttie, laughing a little.

And Mary could believe that Mrs. Egremont, with all her love for her daughter, might find it a relief not to have to keep the peace between the father and child. 'Yet,' she said to herself, 'if Mr. Dutton were here, he would have taken her back the first day.'

CHAPTER II.

DISENCHANTMENT.

‘He promised to buy me a bunch of blue ribbons.’

ST. AMBROSE’S road was perfectly delightful as long as there was any expectation of a speedy recall. Every day was precious; every meeting with an old face was joyful; each interchange of words with Mr. Spyers or Gerard Godfrey was hailed as a boon; nothing was regretted but the absence of Monsieur and his master, and that the favourite choir boy’s voice was cracked.

But when there was reason to think that success had been complete, when Miss Headworth had been persuaded by Mary that it was wiser on all accounts not to mortify Alice by refusing the two guineas a week offered for Miss Egremont’s expenses; when a couple of boxes of clothes and books had arrived, and Ursula found herself settled at Micklethwayte till after Christmas, she began first to admit to herself that somehow the place was not all that it had once been to her.

Her mother was absent, that was one thing. Mrs.

Nugent was gone, that was another. There was no Monsieur or Mr. Dutton to keep her in awe of his precision, even while she laughed at it. There were no boarders to patronise and play with, and her education at the High School was over. If she saw a half-clothed child, it was not half so interesting to buy an ulster in the next shop, as it was to turn over the family rag-bag, knit, sew, and contrive! Somehow things had a weariness in them, and the little excitements did not seem to be the exquisite delights they used to be. After having seen *Patience* at the Princess's it was not easy to avoid criticising a provincial *Lady Jane*, and it was the like with other things of more importance. Even the ritual of St. Ambrose's Church no longer struck her as the *ne plus ultra* of beauty, and only incited her to describe London churches.

She resumed her Sunday-school classes, and though she talked at first of their raciness and freedom, she soon longed after the cleanliness, respectfulness, and docility of the despised little Bridgefordites, and uttered bitter things of Micklethwayte turbulence, declaring—perhaps not without truth—that the children had grown much worse in her absence.

And as Mr. Godfrey had been superintendent during the latter half of the time, this was a cruel stroke. He wanted to make her reverse her opinions. And they never met without 'Now, Ursula, don't you remember Jem Burton putting on Miss Pope's spectacles, and grinning at all the class.'

‘Yes; and how Mr. Dutton brought him up to beg her pardon. Now, was any notice taken when that horrid boy—I don’t know his name—turned the hymn they were saying to her into “Tommy, make room for your uncle”?’

‘Oh, Albert Cox! It is no use doing anything to him, he would go off at once to the Primitives.’

‘Let him!’

‘I cannot make him a schismatic.’

‘I wonder what he is now!’

‘Besides, Miss Pope perfectly provokes impertinence.’

‘Then I wouldn’t give her work she can’t do.’

Such an argument as this might be very well at the moment of provocation, but it became tedious when recurred to at every meeting. Nuttie began to wonder when Monks Horton would be inhabited again, and how much notice Lady Kirkaldy would take of her, and she was a good deal disappointed when Mark told her that Lord Kirkaldy had been begged to undertake a diplomatic mission which would keep them abroad all the winter.

There was a certain weariness and want of interest. It was not exactly that there was nothing intellectual going on. There were the lectures, but they were on chemistry, for which Nuttie cared little. There were good solid books, and lively ones too, but they seemed *passé* to one who had heard them discussed in town. Mary and Miss Headworth read and talked them over, and perhaps their opinions were quite as wise, and

Miss Nugent's conversation was equal to that of any of Nuttie's London friends, but it was only woman's talk after all—the brilliancy and piquancy, the touch and go, she had enjoyed in Lady Kirkaldy's drawing-room was lacking.

Mr. Spyers was too much immersed in parish matters to read anything secular, and neither he nor Gerard Godfrey seemed ever to talk of anything but parish matters. There was not the slightest interest in anything beyond. Foreign politics, European celebrities,—things in which Nuttie had learnt to take warm interest when with the Kirkaldys, were nothing to them. Even Mary wondered at her endeavours to see the day's paper, and she never obtained either information or sympathy unless she came across Mark. It seemed to her that Gerard cared less for the peace or war of an empire than for a tipsy cobbler taking the pledge. The monotony and narrowness of the world where she had once been so happy fretted and wearied her, though she was ashamed of herself all the time, and far too proud to allow that she was tired of it all. Aunt Ursel at her best had always been a little dry and grave, an authority over the two nieces; and though softened, she was not expansive, did not invite confidences, and home was not home without the playfellow-mother.

And most especially was she daily tired of Gerard Godfrey! Had he always talked of nothing but 'the colours,' chants, E. C. U., classes, and teetotalism? Whatever she began it always came back to one or

other of these subjects, and when she impatiently declared that she was perfectly sick of hearing of the Use of Sarum, he looked at her as guilty of a profanity.

Perhaps it was true that he was narrower than he had been. He was a good, honest, religiously-minded lad, but with no great depth or grasp of intellect; Ursula Egremont had been his companion first and then his romance, and the atmosphere of the community in which he lived had been studious and intelligent. His expedition to Redcastle had convinced him that the young lady lived in a different world, entirely beyond his reach, and in the reaction of his hopelessness, he had thrown himself into the excitement of the mission, and it had worked on him a zealous purpose to dedicate himself totally to a religious life, giving up all worldly aims, and employing the small capital he could call his own in preparing for the ministry. Mr. Dutton had insisted that he should test his own steadfastness and resolution by another year's work in his present situation before he took any steps.

He had submitted, but still viewed himself as dedicated, and so far as business hours permitted, gave his services like a clerical pupil to St. Ambrose's with the greatest energy, and perhaps somewhat less judgment than if Mr. Dutton had been at hand. Being without natural taste for intellectual pursuits, unless drawn into them by his surroundings, he had dropped them entirely, and read nothing but the ephemeral controversial literature of his party, and not much of

that, for he was teaching, preaching, exhorting, throughout his spare time; while the vicar was in too great need of help to insist on deepening the source from which his zealous assistant drew. As Miss Nugent observed, teetotalism was to him what dissipation was to other young men.

On this vehemence of purpose descended suddenly Ursula Egremont once more; and the human heart could not but be quickened with the idea, not entirely unfounded, that it was to him that she had flown back, and that her exile proved that she cared for him more than for all the delights she had enjoyed as heiress of Bridgefield. The good youth was conscientious to the back-bone, and extremely perplexed between his self-dedication and the rights that their implied understanding might give to her. Was she to be the crowning blessing of his life, to be saved partly through his affection from worldly trials and temptations, and bestowing on him a brilliant lot in which boundless good could be effected? Or was she a syren luring him to abandon his higher and better purposes?

The first few days of her stay, the former belief made him feel like treading on air, or like the hero of many a magazine story; but as time went on this flattering supposition began to fail him, when Nuttie showed her weariness of the subjects which, in his exclusiveness, he deemed the only ones worthy of a Christian, or rather of a Catholic. Both of them had outgrown the lively, aimless chatter and little jests that had succeeded the games of childhood, and the

growth had been in different directions, so that Ursula felt herself untrue to her old romance when she became weary of his favourite topics, disappointed by his want of sympathy and comprehension, fretted by his petty disapprovals, and annoyed by his evident distaste for Mark, to whom she turned as to one of her proper world.

At last, after many tossings, Gerard fixed upon a test. If she endured it she would be the veritable maiden of his imagination, and they would stand by one another, come what would; if not, he would believe that the past had been fancy, not love, or love that had not withstood the attractions of fashionable life. A great temperance meeting was coming on, and Gerard, eager at once to fill the room, and to present a goodly roll of recruits, watched anxiously for his moment, and came on Nuttie with his hands full of bills in huge letters, and his pockets of badges.

‘Excellent speakers,’ he cried. ‘We shall have the hall crowded. You’ll come, Ursula?’

‘I don’t know what Miss Mary will do. I don’t think she means it.’

‘Oh, if you insist, if we both insist, she will. Look at the paper—we are to have some splendid experiences.’

Nuttie made a face. ‘I’ve heard all about those,’ she said. ‘That man,’ pointing to one of the names, ‘regularly rants about it; he is like a madman.’

‘He does go rather far, but it is quite necessary, as you will hear. Oh, Nuttie, if you would only be one of us! I’ve brought a card! If you would!’

‘Why, what’s the use, Gerard! I don’t like wine, I never do drink it, except a little claret-cup sometimes when I can’t get water.’

‘Then it would cost you nothing.’

‘Yes, it would. It would make me ridiculous.’

‘You used not to heed the sneers of the world.’

‘Not for anything worth doing—but this is not.’

‘It is the greatest cause of the day!’ he cried, in an eager exalted manner, which somewhat inclined her to laugh. ‘Do away with alcohol and you would do away with crime!’

‘Thank you for the compliment, Gerard; I never found that the infinitesimal drop of alcohol that I suppose there is in a tumbler of claret-cup disposed me to commit crimes.’

‘Why won’t you understand me, Ursula! Can’t you give up that for the sake of saving others!’

‘I wonder whom it would save.’

‘Example saves! If you put on this’—taking out the badge—‘how many should you not lead at your home?’

‘Just nobody! Mother and I should have a bad time of it, that’s all.’

‘And if you endured, what would not your testimony effect in the household and village?’

‘Nothing! I have nothing to do with the men-servants, and as to the village, it is very sober. There’s only one public house, and that is kept by Uncle William’s old butler, and is as orderly as can be.’

‘Ah! that’s the way you all deceive yourselves.

Moderate drinkers are ten times more mischievous than regular drunkards.'

'Thank you, Gerard! And outrageous abstainers are more mischievous than either of them, because they make the whole thing so utterly foolish and absurd.' She was really angry now, and so was Gerard.

'Is that your ultimatum?' he asked, in a voice that he strove to render calm.

'Certainly; I'm not going to take the pledge.'

Having quarrelled in childhood, made quarrelling now easier, and Gerard answered bitterly:

'Very well, I hope you will have no cause to repent it.'

'Tis not the way to make me repent it, to see how it seems to affect some people's common sense. It is just as if all your brains had run to water!' said Nuttie, laughing a little; but Gerard was desperately serious, and coloured vehemently.

'Very well, Miss Egremont, I understand. I have had my answer,' he said, gathering up his papers and marching out of the room.

She stood still, offended, and not in the least inclined to run after him and take back her words. He, poor fellow, stumbled down the steps, and held by the garden rail to collect his senses and compose himself.

'What's the matter, Gerard, are you ill or giddy?' asked Miss Nugent, coming up in the winter twilight.

'No, oh no! Only the dream of my life is over,' he answered, scarce knowing what he said.

'You haven't——' cried Mary aghast.

‘Oh no,’ he said, understanding the blank, ‘only she won’t take the pledge!’

‘I don’t see how she could or ought,’ responded Mary. ‘Is that all?’

‘I had made it the test,’ muttered poor Gerard. ‘It is right! It is all over now. I shall know how to go on my way. It is best so—I know it is—only I did not know whether anything was due to her.’ It was almost a sob.

‘Dear old Gerard,’ said Mary, ‘I see you meant to do right. It is well your mind should be settled. I think you’ll find comfort in your good work.’

He wrung her hand, and she went in, half amused, for she was fully aware of the one-sidedness of the mania for temperance under which he acted, yet honouring his high, pure motives, and rejoicing that he had found this indirect mode of gauging Nuttie’s feelings towards him—that is, if he was right about them, and there was no revulsion.

Far from it. Nuttie was still angry. ‘Gerard had been so ridiculous,’ she said, ‘teasing her to take the pledge, and quite incapable of understanding her reasons. I can’t think why Gerard has grown so stupid.’

‘Enthusiasms carry people away,’ returned Mary.

‘If Mr. Dutton had only stayed, he would have kept Gerard like himself,’ said Nuttie.

But there was no relenting. The two young people avoided each other; and perhaps Nuttie was secretly relieved that the romance she had outgrown no longer entangled her.

CHAPTER III.

A FAILURE.

‘ Would I had loved her more !’—MRS. HEMANS.

‘ ON the 14th of January, at Bridgefield Egremont, the wife of Alwyn Piercefield Egremont, Esquire, a son and heir.’

Ursula had been prepared for this event for about a fortnight by a long tender letter from her mother, mourning over the not meeting at Christmas, and the long separation, but saying that she had wished to spare the long anxiety, and that it had been a trying time which she felt herself able to cope with better alone, than even with her dear Nuttie, knowing her to be happy and safe with Aunt Ursel. Now, if all went well, they would have a happy meeting, and begin on a new score. ‘ If the will of God should be otherwise,’ added Alice, ‘ I am sure I need not entreat my Nuttie to do and be all that she can to her father. My child, you do not know how sorely he needs such love and tendance and prayer as you can give him. I know you have thought I have set you aside—if not

better things, for his sake. Indeed I could not help it.' Then there was something tear-stained and blotted out, and it ended with, 'He is beginning to miss your step and voice about the house. I believe he will really be glad to see you, when the bright spring days come, and I can kiss my own Nuttie again.'

Nuttie was very much delighted, but a little hurt that her aunt and Mary should have been in the secret, and pledged to say nothing to her till her mother should write. She found, moreover, that Miss Headworth was extremely anxious and not altogether reassured by Mrs. William Egremont's letter of announcement, which filled Nuttie with delight. How happy the little mother must be to have a baby in her arms again, and though she herself did not profess to have a strong turn for infant humanity, it was the greatest possible relief to be no longer an heiress, excepting that the renunciation in favour of Mark was no longer practicable.

The residence at Redcastle was not over, but the Canoness had come to nurse her sister-in-law, and kept up the correspondence. The son and heir was reported to be a perfect specimen, and his father was greatly elated and delighted, but the letters showed anxiety about the mother, who did not get on as she ought, and seemed to have no power of rally about her. At length came a letter that seemed to burn itself into Nuttie's brain—

'MY DEAR URSULA—Your mother is longing to see you. You had better come home directly. Your aunt saved her

before. Tell her if she will come, she shall have my deepest gratitude. I shall send to meet the 5.11 train.—Your affectionate father,
A. P. EGREMONT.'

Mrs. William Egremont wrote at more length. Symptoms had set in which filled the doctors and nurses with double anxiety. Advice had been sent for from London, and Mr. Egremont was in an uncontrollable state of distress. She had undertaken to summon Ursula home, and to beg Miss Headworth to undertake the journey. She evidently did not know that her brother-in-law had written himself, and before they could start a telegram terrified them, but proved to contain no fresh tidings, only a renewed summons.

Miss Headworth forgot all her resolutions about Mr. Egremont's hospitality—her Alice was her only thought, and all the remedies that had been found efficacious at Dieppe. The good lady had a certain confidence in her own nursing and experience of Alice, which buoyed her up with hope, while Ursula seemed absolutely stunned. She had never thought of such a frightful loss or grief, and her mental senses were almost paralysed, so that she went through the journey in a kind of surface trance, observing all around her much as usual, looking out for the luggage and for the servant who had come to meet them with the report, 'No change.' She did the honours of the carriage, and covered Miss Headworth with the fur rug. They wanted it, for they were shivering with anxiety.

Canon Egremont came out to the front hall to meet them, and put his arms round Nuttie tenderly,

saying, 'My poor dear child!' then as he saw he had frightened them, 'No, no! She is alive—conscious they say, only so very weak.' Then with something of his usual urbane grace, he held out his hand, 'Miss Headworth, it is very good in you to come. You have a great deal to forgive.'

He took them into the tent-room, where tea was standing, interrupting himself in the account he was giving to bid Nuttie let her aunt have some. It was plain from his manner that he had given up hope, and in another minute he hurried his brother, looking terribly haggard and with bloodshot eyes, giving his hand to each, with, 'That's right, Miss Headworth, thank you. Come, let me know what you think of her!'

'Does she know they are come?' said the Canon. 'No? Then, Alwyn, let them have some tea, and take off their things. I can tell you, the nurses will never let them in just off a journey.'

Miss Headworth seconded this, and Mr. Egremont submitted, allowing that she had not asked for Nuttie since the morning, and then had smiled and squeezed his hand when he said she was coming with her aunt; but he walked up and down in direful restlessness, his whole mind apparently bent on extracting from Miss Headworth that she had been as ill or worse at Dieppe.

Alas! when Mrs. William Egremont came down to fetch Nuttie; there was no question that matters were much worse. The sweet face was perfectly white and wasted, and the heavy lids of the dark eyes

scarcely lifted themselves, but the lips moved into a smile, and the hand closed on that of the girl, who stood by her as one frozen into numbness. There was the same recognition when her aunt was brought to her side, the poor old lady commanding herself with difficulty, as the loving glance quivered over the face.

Time passed on, and she still held Nuttie's hand. Once, when a little revived by some stimulant at her lips, she made an effort and said, 'Stay with him! Take care of him! *Love* him! And your little brother, my Nuttie! Promise!'

'I promise,' the girl answered, scarce knowing what she said.

And the eyes closed with an air of peace and rest.

Again when Miss Headworth was doing something to ease her position she said, 'Thank you,' and then more vigorously, 'Thank you, dear aunt, for all you have been to us.'

There was little more. She asked Nuttie for 'her hymn,' the evening hymn with which mother and daughter used nightly to go to sleep, and which, in her strange dreamy way, the girl managed to say.

Then a little murmur and sign passed between the elder ladies, and Mrs. William Egremont fetched her husband. As he opened his book to find the commendatory prayer, thinking her past all outward consciousness, and grieved by the look of suffering, her eyes again unclosed and her lips said, 'Failed.'

'Don't think of that! God can make failures success.'

There was a half smile, a look of peace. ‘*He makes up,*’ she said; and those were the last audible words before it was over, and the tender spirit was released from its strife, some time later, they only knew when by the failure of the clasp on her husband’s hand.

Old Miss Headworth did not understand the meaning of that sad word till the next forenoon. Then,—as she sat in the darkened tent-room, crying over her letters,—while the stunned and bewildered Nuttie was, under her Aunt Jane’s direction, attending to the needful arrangements, Canon Egremont wandered in upon her in the overflow of confidence of a man with a full heart, wanting to talk it all out, communicating the more, because she was a discreet woman, and asked no questions. He had tried to see his brother, but Gregorio had not admitted him. He was aware now of the whole state of things. Dr. Hammond had told him, when first beginning to be alarmed for his patient, that the principal cause for anxiety was the exhaustion caused by the long strain on her spirits and strength consequent on her efforts to wean her husband from his fatal propensity. There had been other ‘complications,’ as the doctor called them, and more immediate causes of danger, but both he and his colleague, summoned from London, believed that she would have surmounted them if she had had more strength to rally. But her nurses dated the decided turn for the worse from the day when she had gazed up into Mr. Egremont’s face, and detected the look in his eyes that she had learnt too well to understand.

She would fain have lived, and, according to her obedient nature, had submitted to all the silence and stillness enforced on her; but she had told Dr. Hammond that she must see her brother-in-law before she was too far gone. And the doctor, knowing all, took care it should be brought about.

And then she had spoken of her failure in the effort of these years. 'If I had begun better,' she said, 'it might not have been so with him.'

'My dear, indeed you have nothing to blame yourself for. You were grievously sinned against by us all. Alwyn was no saint when he drew you into it—and you, you have been his good angel, doing all and more too,' said the Canon, almost breaking down.

'I tried—but if I had been a better woman—— And to leave him to that man!'

'Child, child, victories sometimes come this way!' he cried, scarce knowing how it was put into his mouth, but glad to see the light in her eye.

'Thanks,' she replied. 'No, I ought not to have said that. I leave him to God, and my poor Nuttie. I want you to tell her, if I can't, what she must try to do. If I had but brought them together more! But I tried for the best.'

Then she begged for her last communion, saying, 'I *do* pray for that poor Gregorio. Isn't that forgiving him?' And the attempt to exchange forgiveness with the Canon for their mutual behaviour at the time of her marriage overcame them both so much that they had to leave it not half uttered. Indeed, in speaking

of the scene, William Egremont was utterly overwhelmed.

‘And that’s the woman that I treated as a mere outcast!’ he cried, walking about the little room. ‘Oh God, forgive me! I shall never forgive myself.’

Poor Miss Headworth! In past days she had longed for any amount of retribution on Alice’s hard-hearted employers, but it was a very different thing to witness such grief and self reproach. He had in truth much more developed ideas of duty, both as man and priest, than when he had passively left a disagreeable subject to his mother-in-law, as lying within a woman’s province; and his good heart was suffering acutely for the injustice and injury in which he had shared towards one now invested with an almost saintly halo.

In the gush of feeling he had certainly revealed more to Miss Headworth, than his wife, or even he himself, in his cooler moments, would have thought prudent, and he ended by binding her to secrecy; and saying that he should only tell his niece what was necessary for her to know.

Nuttie was going about, dry-eyed and numbed, glad of any passing occupation that would prevent the aching sense of desolation at her heart from gaining force to overwhelm her; courting employment, and shunning pity and condolence, but she could not escape when her uncle took her hand, made her sit down by him, with ‘I want to speak to you, my dear;’ and told her briefly and tenderly what her mother’s effort

had been, and of the message and task she had bequeathed. The poor girl's heart fainted within her.

'Oh! but, Uncle William, how can I? How can I ever? Mother could do things I never could! He *did* care for her! He does not care for me!'

'You must teach him to do so, Nuttie.'

'Oh!' she said, with a hopeless sound.

The Canon did think it very hopeless in his heart, but he persevered, as in duty bound. 'I told your dear mother that perhaps you would succeed where she thought she had failed, though indeed she had done much. It made her happy. So, my dear child, you are bound to do your best.'

'Yes;' then, after a pause—'But mother could coax him and manage him. Mother was with him day and night; she could always get at him. What can I do?'

'I think you will find that he depends upon you more,' said the Canon, 'and it may be made easier to you, if you only set your will to it.'

'If I ought, I'll try,' said poor Nuttie, more humbly perhaps than she had ever spoken before, but in utter dejection, and her uncle answered her like a child.

'There, that's a good girl. Nobody can do more.'

For the Canon had one hope. He had not thought it becoming to speak to her of the counter influence, but he could not help thinking it possible that if he and his son, backed by doctor and lawyer, made a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull altogether, they might induce his brother to part with Gregorio, and this would render Ursula's task far less impossible.

He was confirmed in this hope by finding that Mark's arrival was not unwelcome to Mr. Egremont, who seemed to have forgotten the unpleasantness with which he had regarded the engagement, and only remembered that his nephew had been Alice's champion, resuming old customs of dependence, making him act as amanuensis, and arraigning the destiny that had restored so lovely and charming a creature only to snatch her away, leaving nothing but a headstrong girl and a helpless baby.

That poor little fellow was all that could be desired at his age, but Nuttie felt her beautiful mother almost insulted when the elder ladies talked of the wonderful resemblance that the Canoness declared to have been quite startling in the earlier hours of his life. For the convenience of one of the sponsors, he was to be christened in the afternoon following the funeral, the others being — by his mother's special entreaty — his sister and Mark. Egremont customs were against the ladies going to the funeral, so that Nuttie was kept at home, much against her will; but after the luncheon she escaped, leaving word with her aunts that she was going to walk down to church alone, and they were sorry enough for her to let her have her own way, especially as her father, having been to the funeral, had shut himself up and left all the rest to them.

The Egremont family had a sort of enclosure or pen with iron rails round it close to the church wall, where they rested under flat slabs. The gate in this was open now, and the new-made grave was one mass

of white flowers,—wreaths and crosses, snowdrops, hyacinths, camellias, and the like,—and at the feet was a flowerpot with growing plants of the white hyacinth called in France '*lys de la Vierge*.' These, before they became frequent in England, had been grown in Mr. Dutton's greenhouse, and having been favourites with Mrs. Egremont, it had come to be his custom every spring to bring her the earliest plants that bloomed. Nuttie knew them well, the careful tying up, the neat arrangement of moss over the earth, the peculiar trimness of the whole; and as she looked, the remembrance of the happy times of old, the sick longing for all that was gone, did what nothing had hitherto effected—brought an overwhelming gush of tears.

There was no checking them now that they had come. She fled into church on the first sounds of arrival and hid herself in the friendly shelter of the great family pew; but she had to come out and take her place, though she could hardly utter a word, and it was all that she could do to keep from sobbing aloud; she could not hand the babe, and the Canon had to take on trust the name '*Alwyn Headworth*,' for he could not hear the words that were on her trembling lips.

It was soon over; and while the baby and his attendants, with Miss Headworth, were being packed into the carriage, and her uncle and aunt bowing off the grand god-father, she clutched her cousin's arm, and said, '*Mark; where's Mr. Dutton?*'

‘I—I didn’t know he was coming, but now you ask, I believe I saw him this morning.’

‘I *know* he is here.’

‘Do you want to see him?’ said Mark kindly.

‘Oh, if I might!’

Then, with a sudden impulse, she looked back into the church, and recognised a black figure and slightly bald head bowed down in one of the seats. She pointed him out. ‘No doubt he is waiting for us all to be gone,’ said Mark in a low voice. ‘You go into the Rectory, Nuttie; there’s a fire in the study, and I’ll bring him to you there. I’ll get him to stay the night if I can.’

‘Oh, thank you!’ and it was a really fervent answer.

Mark waited, and when Mr. Dutton rose, was quite shocked at his paleness and the worn look on his face, as of one who had struggled hard for resignation and calm. He started, almost as if a blow had been struck him, as Mark uttered his name in the porch, no doubt having never meant to be perceived nor to have to speak to any one; but in one moment his features had recovered their usual expression of courteous readiness. He bowed his head when Mark told him that Ursula wanted to shake hands with him, and came towards the Rectory, but he entirely declined the invitation to sleep there, declaring that he must return to London that night.

Mark opened the study door, and then went away to secure that the man whom he had learnt to esteem

very highly should at least have some refreshment before he left the house.

Those few steps had given Mr. Dutton time to turn from a mourner to a consoler, and when Nuttie came towards him with her hand outstretched, and 'Oh, Mr. Dutton, Mr. Dutton!' he took it in both his, and with a calm broken voice said, 'God has been very good to us in letting us know one like her.'

'But oh! what can we do without her?'

'Ah, Nuttie! that always comes before us. But I saw your work and your comfort just now.'

'Poor little boy! I shall get to care about him, I know, but as yet I can only feel how much rather I would have *her*.'

'No doubt, but it is *her* work that is left you.'

'Her work? Yes! But oh, Mr. Dutton, you don't know how dreadful it is!'

He did not know what she meant. Whether it was simply the burthen on any suddenly motherless girl, or any special evil on her father's part, but he was soon enlightened, for there was something in this old friend that drew out her confidence beyond all others, even when he repressed her, and she could not help telling him in a few murmured furtive words such as she knew she ought not to utter, and he felt it almost treason to hear. 'Opiates! she was always trying to keep my father from them! It was too much for her! My uncle says I must try to do it, and I can't.'

'Poor child!' said Mr. Dutton kindly, though cut

to the heart at the revelation of sweet Alice's trial; 'at least you can strive, and there is always a blessing on resolution.'

'Oh, if you knew! and he doesn't like me. I don't think I've ever been nice to him, and that vexed her! I haven't got her ways.'

'No,' said Mr. Dutton, 'but you will learn others. Look here, Nuttie. You used to be always craving for grand and noble tasks, the more difficult the better. I think you have got one now, more severe than ever could have been thought of—and very noble. What are those lines about the task "bequeathed from bleeding sire to son"? Isn't it like that? You are bound to go on with her work, and the more helpless you feel, and the more you throw yourself on God, the more God will help you. He takes the will for the deed, if only you have will enough; and, Nuttie, you can pray that you may be able to love and honour him.'

Teacups were brought in, followed by Mark, and interrupted them; and, after a short interval, they parted at the park gate, and Ursula walked home with Mark, waked from her dull numb trance, with a crushed feeling as if she had been bruised all over, and yet with a purpose within her.

CHAPTER IV.

FARMS OR UMBRELLAS.

‘He tokin into his handis
His londis and his lode.’—CHAUCER.

‘MARK! Mark!’ A little figure stood on the gravel road leading through Lescombe Park, and lifted up an eager face, as Mark jumped down from his horse. ‘I made sure you would come over.’

‘Yes, but I could not get away earlier. And I have so much to say to you and your mother, Annable; there’s a great proposition to be considered’

‘Oh dear! and here is John bearing down upon us. Never mind. We’ll get into the mither’s room and be cosy!’

‘Well, Mark,’ said Sir John’s hearty voice, ‘I thought you would be here. Come to luncheon? That’s right! And how is poor Egremont? I thought he looked awful at the funeral.’

‘He is fairly well, thank you; but it was a terrible shock.’

‘I should think so. To find such a pretty sweet

creature just to lose her again. Child likely to live, eh ?'

'Oh yes, he is a fine fellow, and has never had anything amiss with him.'

'Poor little chap ! Doesn't know what he has lost ! Well, Nannie,' as they neared the house, 'do you want a *tête-à-tête* or to take him in to your mother ? Here, I'll take the horse.'

'Come to her at once,' said Annaple ; 'she wants to hear all, and besides she is expecting me.'

Mark was welcomed by Lady Ronnisglen with inquiries for all concerned, and especially for that 'poor girl.' 'I do pity a young thing who has to take a woman's place too soon,' she said. 'It takes too much out of her !'

'I should think Ursula had plenty of spirit,' said Annaple.

'I don't know whether spirit is what is wanted,' said Mark. 'Her mother prevailed more without it than I am afraid she is likely to do with it.'

'Complements answer better than parallels sometimes, but not always,' said Lady Ronnisglen.

'Which are we ?' asked Annaple demurely.

'Not parallels certainly, for then we should never meet,' responded Mark. 'But here is the proposal. My father and all the rest of us have been doing our best to get my uncle to smooth Ursula's way by getting rid of that valet of his.'

'The man with the Mephistopheles face ?'

'Exactly. He is a consummate scoundrel, as we all know, and so does my uncle himself, but he has been

about him these twelve or fourteen years, and has got a sort of hold on him—that—that—It is no use to talk of it, but it did not make that dear aunt of mine have an easier life. In fact I should not be a bit surprised if he had been a hindrance in the hunting her up. Well, the fellow thought proper to upset some arrangements my mother had made, and then was more insolent than I should have thought even he could have been towards *her*. I suppose he had got into the habit with poor Aunt Alice. That made a fulcrum, and my father went at my uncle with a will. I never saw my father so roused in my life. I don't mean by the behaviour to his wife, but at what he knew of the fellow, and all the harm he had done and is doing. And actually my uncle gave in at last, and consented to tell Gregorio to look out for another situation, if he has not feathered his nest too well to need one, as I believe he has.'

'Oh, that will make it much easier for Ursula!' cried Annapple.

'If he goes,' put in her mother.

'I think he will. I really had no notion how much these two years have improved my uncle! To be sure, it would be hard to live with such a woman as that without being the better for it! But he really seems to have acquired a certain notion of duty!'

They did not smile at the simple way in which Mark spoke of this vast advance, and Lady Ronnisglen said, 'I hope so, for the sake of his daughter and that poor little boy.'

'I think that has something to do with it,' said

Mark. 'He feels a responsibility, and still more, I think he was struck by having a creature with him to whom evil was like physical pain.'

'It will work,' said Lady Ronnisglen.

'Then,' went on Mark, 'he took us all by surprise by making me this proposal—to take the management of the estate, and become a kind of private secretary to him. You know he gets rheumatism on the optic nerve, and is almost blind at times. He would give me £300 a year, and do up the house at the home farm, rent free. What do you say to that, Annaple?'

There was a silence, then Annaple said: 'Give up the umbrellas! Oh! What do you think, Mark?'

'My father wishes it,' said Mark. 'He would, as he had promised to do, make over to me my share of my own mother's fortune, and that would, I have been reckoning, bring us to just what we had thought of starting upon this spring at Micklethwayte.'

'The same *now*,' said Lady Ronnisglen, after some reckoning, 'but what does it lead to?'

'Well—nothing, I am afraid,' said Mark; 'as you know, this is all I have to reckon upon. The younger children will have hardly anything from their mother, so that my father's means must chiefly go to them.'

'And this agency is entirely dependent on your satisfying Mr. Egremont?'

'True, but that's a thing only too easily done. However, as you say, this agency has no future, and if that came to an end, I should only have to look out for another or take to farming.'

‘And ask poor John if that is a good speculation nowadays!’ said Annapple.

‘Fortunes are and have been made on the umbrellas,’ said Mark. ‘Greenleaf has a place almost equal to Monks Horton, and Dutton, though he makes no show, has realised a considerable amount.’

‘Oh yes, let us stick to the umbrellas!’ cried Annapple; ‘you’ve made the plunge, so it does not signify now, and we should be so much more independent out of the way of everybody.’

‘You would lose in society,’ said Mark, ‘excepting, of course, as to the Monks Horton people; but they are often away.’

‘Begging your pardon, Mark, is there much to lose in this same neighbourhood?’ laughed Annapple, ‘now May will go.’

‘It is not so much a question of liking,’ added her mother, ‘as of what is for the best, and where you may wish to be—say ten years hence.’

Looked at in this way, there could be no question but that the umbrella company promised to make Mark a richer man in ten years’ time than did the agency at Bridgefield Egremont. He had a salary from the office already, and if he purchased shares in the partnership with the portion his father would resign to him, his income would already equal what he would have at Bridgefield, and there was every prospect of its increase, both as he became more valuable, and as the business continued to prosper. If the descent in life had been a grievance to the ladies, the

agency would have been an infinite boon, but having swallowed so much, as Annapple said, they might as well do it in earnest, and to some purpose. Perhaps, too, it might be detected that under the circumstances Annapple would prefer the living in a small way out of reach of her sister's visible compassion.

So the matter was settled, but there was an under-current in Mark's mind on which he had not entered, namely, that his presence at home might make all the difference in that reformation in his uncle's habits which Alice had inaugurated, and left in the hands of others. With him at hand, there was much more chance of Gregorio's being dispensed with, Ursula's authority maintained, little Alwyn well brought up, and the estate, tenants, and household properly cared for, and then he smiled at his notion of supposing himself of so much importance. Had he only had himself to consider, Mark would have thought his duty plain ; but when he found Miss Ruthven and her mother so entirely averse, he did not deem it right to sacrifice them to the doubtful good of his uncle, nor indeed to put the question before them as so much a matter of conscience that they should feel bound to consider it in that light. He did indeed say, 'Well, that settles it,' in a tone that led Annapple to exclaim : 'I do believe you want to drop the umbrellas !'

'No,' he answered, 'it is not that, but my father wished it, and thought it would be good for my uncle.'

'No doubt,' said Annapple, 'but he has got a daughter, also a son, and a brother, and agents are

plentiful, so I can't see why all the family should dance attendance on him.'

Lady Ronnisglen, much misdoubting Mr. Egremont's style of society, and dreading that Mark might be dragged into it, added her word, feeling on her side that it was desirable and just to hinder the family from sacrificing Mark's occupation and worldly interest to a capricious old *roué*, who might very possibly throw him over when it would be almost impossible to find anything else to do. Moreover, both she and Annapple believed that the real wish was to rescue the name of Egremont from association with umbrellas, and they held themselves bound to combat what they despised and thought a piece of worldly folly.

So Mark rode home, more glad that the decision was actually made than at the course it had taken. His father was disappointed, but could not but allow that it was the more prudent arrangement; and Mr. Egremont showed all the annoyance of a man whose good offer has been rejected.

'Tis that little giggling Scotch girl!' he said. 'Well, we are quit of her anyway. 'Tis a pity that Mark entangled himself with her, and a mother-in-law into the bargain! I was a fool to expect to get any good out of him!'

This was said to his daughter, with whom he was left alone; for Miss Headworth could not bear to accept his hospitality a moment longer than needful, and besides had been so much shaken in nerves as to suspect that an illness was coming on, and

hurried home to be nursed by Mary Nugent. Canon Egremont was obliged to go back to Redcastle to finish his residence, and his wife, who had been absent nearly a month from her family, thought it really wisest to let the father and daughter be thrown upon one another at once, so that Ursula might have the benefit of her father's softened mood.

There could be no doubt that he was softened, and that he had derived some improvement from the year and a half that his wife had been with him. It might not have lifted him up a step, but it had arrested him in his downward course. Selfish and indolent he was as ever, but there had been a restraint on his amusements, and a withdrawal from his worst associates, such as the state of his health might continue, above all if Gregorio could be dispensed with. The man himself had become aware of the combination against him, and, though reckoning on his master's inertness and dependence upon him, knew that a fresh offence might complete his overthrow, and therefore took care to be on his good behaviour.

Thus Nuttie's task might be somewhat smoothed; but the poor girl felt unspeakably desolate as she ate her breakfast all alone with a dull post-bag, and still more so when, having seen the housekeeper, who, happily for her, was a good and capable woman, and very sorry for her, she had to bethink herself what to do in that dreary sitting-room during the hour when she had always been most sure of her sister-mother's dear company. How often she had grumbled at being

called on to practise duets for her father's evening lullaby! She supposed she ought to get something up, and she proceeded to turn over and arrange the music with a sort of sick loathing for whatever was connected with those days of impatient murmurs, which she would so gladly have recalled. Everything had fallen into disorder, as Blanche and May had left it the last time they had played there; and the overlooking it, and putting aside the pieces which she could never use alone, occupied her till Gregorio, very meek and polite, came with a message that Mr. Egremont would be glad if she would come to his room. In some dread, some distaste, and yet some pity and some honest resolution, she made her way thither.

There he sat, in dressing-gown, smoking-cap, and blue spectacles, with the glittering February sunshine carefully excluded. He looked worse and more haggard than when she had seen him at dinner in the evening, made up for company, and her compassion increased, especially as he not only held out his hand, but seemed to expect her to kiss him, a thing she had never done since their first recognition. It was not pleasant in itself, but it betokened full forgiveness, and indeed he had never spoken to her in his sneering, exasperating voice since her mournful return home.

‘Have you seen the boy?’ he asked.

‘Yes; they are walking him up and down under the south wall,’ said Nuttie, thankful that she had peeped under the many wraps as he was carried across the hall.

‘Here ! I want you to read this letter to me. A man ought to be indicted for writing such a hand !’

It was really distinct penmanship, though minute ; but, as Nuttie found, her father did not like to avow how little available were his eyes. He could write better than he could read, but he kept her over his correspondence for the rest of the morning, answering some of the letters of condolence for him in her own name, writing those of business, and folding and addressing what he himself contrived to write. Her native quickness stood her in good stead, and, being rather nervous, she took great pains, and seldom stumbled ; indeed, she only once incurred an exclamation of impatience at her stupidity or slowness.

She guessed rightly that this forbearance was owing to tender persuasions of her mother, and did not guess that a certain fear of herself was mingled with other motives. Her father had grown used to woman’s ministrations ; he needed them for his precious little heir, and he knew his daughter moreover for a severe judge, and did not want to alienate her and lose her services ; so they got on fairly well together, and she shared his luncheon, during which a message came up about the carriage ; and as there had been an application for some nursery needment, and moreover black-edged envelopes had run short, there was just purpose enough for a drive to the little town.

Then Nuttie read her father to sleep with the newspaper ; rushed round the garden in the twilight to stretch her young limbs ; tried to read a little, dressed,

dined with her father; finished what he had missed in the paper, then offered him music, and was told 'if she pleased,' and as she played she mused whether this was to be her life. It looked very dull and desolate, and what was the good of it all? But there were her mother's words, 'Love him!' How fulfil them? She could pity him now, but oh! how could she love one from whom her whole nature recoiled, when she thought of her mother's ruined life? Mr. Dutton too had held her new duties up to her as capable of being ennobled. Noble! To read aloud a sporting paper she did not want to understand, to be ready to play at cards or billiards, to take that dawdling drive day by day, to devote herself to the selfish exactions of burnt-out dissipation. Was this noble? Her mother had done all this, and never even felt it a cross, because of her great love. It must be Nuttie's cross if it was her duty; but could the love and honour possibly come though she tried to pray in faith?

CHAPTER V.

THE GIGGLING SCOTCH GIRL.

‘For every Lamp that trembled here,
And faded in the night,
Behold a Star serene and clear
Smiles on me from the height.’—B. M.

NUTTIE was not mistaken in supposing that this first day would be a fair sample of her life, though, of course, after the first weeks of mourning there were variations ; and the return of the Rectory party made a good deal of brightening, and relieved her from the necessity of finding companionship and conversation for her father on more than half her afternoons and evenings.

He required her, however, almost every forenoon, and depended on her increasingly, so that all her arrangements had to be made with reference to him. It was bondage, but not as galling in the fact as she would have expected if it had been predicted to her a few months previously. In the first place, Mr. Egremont never demanded of her what was actually against her conscience, except occasionally giving up a Sunday

evensong to read the paper to him, and that only when he was more unwell than usual. He was, after all, an English gentleman, and did not ask his young daughter to read to him the books which her mother had loathed. Moreover, Gregorio was on his good behaviour, perfectly aware that there was a family combination against him, and having even received a sort of warning from his master, but by no means intending to take it, and therefore abstaining from any kind of offence that could furnish a fresh handle against him; and thus for the present, Dr. Hammond's regimen was well observed, and Mr. Egremont was his better self in consequence, for, under his wife's guardianship, the perilous habit had sufficiently lost strength to prevent temper and spirits from manifestly suffering from abstinence.

The first time Nuttie found herself obliged to make any very real sacrifice to her father's will was on the occasion of Mark's marriage at Easter. Things had arranged themselves very conveniently for him at Micklethwayte, though it seemed to Nuttie that she only heard of affairs there in a sort of distant dream, while such events were taking place as once would have been to her the greatest possible revolutions.

Aunt Ursel reached home safely, but her expectations of illness were realised. She took to her bed on arriving, and though she rose from it, there was reason to think she had had a slight stroke, for her activity of mind and body were greatly decayed, and she was wholly dependent on Mary Nugent for care and com-

fort. Mary, remembering the consequences of the former alarm, made the best of the old lady's condition; and Nuttie, ashamed of having once cried 'wolf,' did not realise the true state of the case, nor indeed could she or would she have been spared to go to Micklethwayte.

The next news told that Gerard Godfrey, at the end of the year required by Mr. Dutton, had resigned his situation, and at the close of his quarter's notice was going to prepare for Holy Orders under the training of a clergyman who would employ him in his parish, and assist him in reading up to the requirements for admission to a theological college. Poor dear old Gerard! It gave Nuttie a sort of pang of self-reproach to own how good and devoted he was, and yet so narrow and stupid that she could never have been happy with him. Was he too good, or was he too dull for her? Had she forsaken him for the world's sake, or was it a sound instinct that had extinguished her fancy for him? No one could tell, least of all the parties concerned. He might be far above her in spiritual matters, but he was below her in intellectual ones, and though they would always feel for one another that peculiar tenderness left by the possibilities of a first love, no doubt the quarrel over the blue ribbon had been no real misfortune to either.

The next tidings were still more surprising. Mr. Dutton was leaving the firm. Though his father had died insolvent, and he had had to struggle for himself

in early life, he was connected with wealthy people, and change and death among these had brought him a fair share of riches. An uncle who had emigrated to Australia at the time of the great break up had died without other heirs, leaving him what was the more welcome to him that Micklethwayte could never be to him what it had been in its golden age. He had realised enough to enable him to be bountiful, and his parting gift to St Ambrose's would complete the church; but he himself was winding up the partnership, and withdrawing his means from Greenleaf and Co. in order to go out to Australia to decide what to do with his new possessions.

Mark Egremont purchased a number of the shares, though, to gratify the family, the shelter of the Greenleaf veiled his name under the 'Co.,' and another, already in the firm, possessed of a business-like appellation, gave designation to the firm as Greenleaf, Good-enough, & Co.

Mr. Dutton's well-kept house, with the little conservatory and the magnolia, was judged sufficient for present needs, and the lease was taken off his hands, so that all was in order for the marriage of Mark and Annapple immediately after Easter.

Lady Delmar had resigned herself to the inevitable, and the wedding was to take place at Lescombe. Nuttie, whose chief relaxation was in hearing all the pros and cons from May and Blanche, was asked to be one of the bridesmaids by Annapple, who had come over to the Rectory in a droll inscrutable state of mis-

chief, declaring that she had exasperated Janet to the verge of insanity by declaring that she should have little umbrellas like those in the Persian inscriptions on her cards, and that Mark was to present all the bridesmaids with neat parasols. If crinolines had not been gone out they could have all been dressed appropriately. Now they must wear them closely furled. All this banter was hardly liked by May and Blanche, whose little sisters were laughed at again for needing the assurance that they were really to wear white and rowan leaves and berries—the Ronnisglen badge. Nuttie, who had drawn much nearer to May, refrained from relating this part of the story at home, but was much disappointed when, on telling her father of the request, she was answered at once :

‘Hein ! The 24th ? You’ll be in London, and a very good thing too.’

‘Are we to go so soon ?’

‘Yes. Didn’t I tell you to take that house in Berkshire Road from the 20th ?’

‘I did not think we were to start so soon. Is there any particular reason ?’

‘Yes. That Scotch girl ought to have known better than to ask you in your deep mourning. I thought women made a great point of such things.’

‘Aunt Jane did not seem to think it wrong,’ said Nuttie, for she really wished much for consent. Not only had she grown fond both of Mark and Annapple, but she had never been a bridesmaid, and she knew that not only the Kirkaldys but Mr. Dutton had been

invited; she had even ventured on offering to lodge some of the overflowing guests of the Rectory.

'Their heads are all turned by that poverty-stricken Scotch peerage,' returned Mr. Egremont; 'or the Canoness should have more sense of respect.'

Nuttie's wishes were so strong that she made one more attempt, 'I need not be a bridesmaid. They would not mind if I wore my black.'

'I should, then!' said her father curtly. 'If they don't understand the proprieties of life, I do. I won't have you have anything to do with it. If you are so set upon gaiety, you'll have enough of weddings at fitter times!'

It was the old sneering tone. Nuttie felt partly confounded, partly indignant, and terribly disappointed. She *did* care for the sight of the wedding—her youthful spirits had rallied enough for that, but far more now she grieved at missing the sight of Mr. Dutton, when he was going away, she knew not where, and might perhaps come on purpose to see her; and it also made her sore and grieved at being accused of disregard to her mother. She was silenced, however, and presently her father observed, in the same unpleasant tone, 'Well, if you've digested your disappointment, perhaps you'll condescend to write to the agent, that I expect the house to be ready on the 21st.'

Nuttie got through her morning's work she hardly knew how, though her father was dry and fault-finding all the time. Her eyes were so full of tears when she

was released that she hardly saw where she was going, and nearly ran against her aunt, who had just walked into the hall. Mrs. Egremont was too prudent a woman to let her burst out there with her grievance, but made her come into the tent-room before she exclaimed, 'He is going to take me away to London; he won't let me go to the wedding.'

'I am sorry for your disappointment,' said her aunt quietly, 'but I am old-fashioned enough to be glad that such strong respect and feeling should be shown for your dear mother. I wish Annapple had spoken to me before asking you, and I would have felt the way.'

'I'm sure it is not want of feeling,' said Nuttie, as her tears broke forth.

'I did not say it was,' returned her aunt, 'but different generations have different notions of the mode of showing it; and the present certainly errs on the side of neglect of such tokens of mourning. If I did not think that Annapple and her mother are really uncomfortable at Lescombe, I should have told Mark that it was better taste to wait till the summer.'

'If I might only have stayed at home—even if I did not go to the wedding,' sighed Nuttie, who had only half listened to the Canoness's wisdom.

'Since you do not go, it is much better that you should be out of the way,' said Mrs. Egremont. 'Is your father ready to see me?'

So Nuttie had to submit, though she pouted to herself, feeling grievously misjudged, first as if she had been wanting in regard to the memory of her mother, who

had been so fond of Mark, and so rejoiced in his happiness; and then that her vexation was treated as mere love of gaiety, whereas it really was disappointment at not seeing Mr. Dutton, that good, grave, precise old friend, who could not be named in the same breath with vanity. Moreover, she could not help suspecting that respect to her mother was after all only a cloak to resentment against Mark and his marriage.

However, she bethought herself that her mother had often been disappointed and had borne it cheerfully, and after having done what Aunt Ursel would have called 'grizzling' in her room for an hour, she wrote her note to Miss Ruthven and endeavoured to be as usual, feeling keenly that there was no mother now to perceive and gratefully commend one of her only too rare efforts for good humour. On other grounds she was very sorry to leave Bridgefield. May had, in her trouble, thawed to her, and they were becoming really affectionate and intimate companions, by force of propinquity and relationship, as well as of the views that May had imbibed from Hugh Condamine. Moreover Nuttie felt her aunt's watch over the baby a great assistance to her own ignorance.

However the Canoness had resigned to the poor little heir the perfect and trustworthy nurse, whom Basil had outgrown, and who consented to the transfer on condition of having her nursery establishment entirely apart from the rest of the household. Her reasons were known though unspoken, namely, that the rejection of one or two valets highly recommended

had made it plain that there had been no dislodgment of Gregorio. The strong silent objection to him of all good female servants was one of the points that told much against him. Martin and the house-keeper just endured him, and stayed on for the present chiefly because their dear lady had actually begged them not to desert her daughter if they could help it, at least not at first.

Nuttie bound over her cousins to give her a full account of the wedding, and both of them wrote to her. Blanche's letter recorded sundry scattered particulars,—as to how well the rowan-trimmed tulle dresses looked—how every one was packed into the carriages for the long drive—how there had been a triumphal arch erected over the Bluepost Bridge itself, and Annapple nearly choked with laughing at the appropriateness—how, to her delight, a shower began, and the procession out of the church actually cried out for umbrellas—how papa, when performing the ceremony, could not recollect that the bride's proper name was Annabella, and would dictate it as Anna-Maria, Sir John correcting him each time *sotto voce*—how Basil and little Hilda Delmar walked together and 'looked like a couple of ducks,' which, it was to be hoped, was to be taken metaphorically—how dreadfully hard the ice on the wedding-cake was, so that when Annapple tried to cut it the knife slipped and a little white dove flew away and hit May, which everyone said was a grand omen that she would be the next bride, while of course Annapple was perfectly helpless

with mirth. Every one said it was the merriest wedding ever seen, for the bride's only tears were those of laughter. What Nuttie really cared for most came just at the end, and not much of that. 'Your Mr. Dutton is just gone. He got on famously with Hugh Condamine, and I forgot to tell you that he has given Mark such a jolly present, a lovely silver coffee-pot, just the one thing they wanted, and Lady Delmar said he didn't look near so like a tradesman as she expected. I see May is writing too, but I don't know what you will get out of her, as Hugh Condamine came for the day.'

Nuttie, however, had more hopes from May. Her letter certainly was fuller of interest, if shorter.

'MY DEAR NUTTIE—Blanche has no doubt told you all the externals. I suppose there never was a brighter wedding, for as Annapple keeps her mother with her, there was no real rending asunder of ties. Indeed I almost wish her excitement did not always show itself in laughing, for it prevents people from understanding how much there is in her.

(Plainly Hugh Condamine had been rather scandalised by the 'giggling Scotch girl.')

'Dear old Lady Ronnisglen was delightful. If there were any tears, they were hers, and Lady Delmar was very cordial and affectionate. Of course Hugh and Mr. Dutton missed much that one would have liked in a wedding. I drove back with them afterwards, and it was very interesting to listen to their conversation about church matters. Hugh is very much struck with your friend; he

had heard a good deal about Micklethwayte before, and says that such a lay worker is perfectly invaluable. It is a great pity that he is not going on in the firm, it would make it so much nicer for Mark; but he says he has duties towards his new property. I think he was sorry not to find you at home, but he plainly never thought it possible you should be at the wedding. I don't know whether I ought to tell you this, but I think you ought to know it. There is a lovely new wreath of Eucharis lilies and maiden-hair at dear Aunt Alice's grave, close against the rails at the feet; and Hugh told me that he looked out of his window very early yesterday morning and saw Mr. Dutton standing there, leaning on the rail, with his bare head bowed between his hands. You can't think how it impressed Hugh. He said he felt reverent towards him all through that day, and he was quite angry with Rosalind and Adela for jesting because, when the shower began as we were coming out of church, Mr. Dutton rushed up with an umbrella, being the only person there who had one, I believe. Hugh says you may be proud of such a friend. I wish you could have seen Hugh.—Your affectionate cousin,

MARGARET EGREMONT.'

CHAPTER VI.

THREE YEARS LATER.

‘There’s something rotten in the State.’—*Hamlet*.

ON an east-windy afternoon in March Mary Nugent emerged from the School of Art, her well-worn portfolio under her arm, thinking how many successive generations of boys and girls she had drilled through ‘free-hand,’ ‘perspective,’ and even ‘life’ with an unvarying average of failure and very moderate success, and how little talent or originality had come to the front, though all might be the better for knowing how to use eyes and fingers.

On the whole her interest as well as her diligence did not flag; but a sense of weariness and monotony would sometimes come after a recurrence of well-known blunders of her pupils, and she missed the sense of going home to refreshment and enjoyment which had once invigorated her. St. Ambrose’s Road had had its golden age, but the brightness had been dimmed ever since that festival at Monks Horton. One after another of the happy old society had dropped

away. The vicar had received promotion, and she only remained of the former intimates, excepting old Miss Headworth, who was no longer a companion, but whom affection forbade her to desert in feeble old age. Had her thoughts of the old times conjured up a figure belonging to them? There was the well-brushed hat, the natty silk umbrella, the perfect fit of garments, the precise turn-out, nay, the curly lion-shaven poodle, with all his fringes, leaping on her in recognition, and there was that slightly French flourish of the hat, before—with a bounding heart—she met the hand in an English grasp.

‘Miss Nugent!’

‘Mr. Dutton!’

‘I thought I should meet you here!’

‘When did you come?’

‘Half an hour ago. I came down with George Greenleaf, left my things at the Royal Hotel, and came on to look for you.’

‘You will come and spend the evening with us?’

‘If you are so good as to ask me. How is Miss Headworth?’

‘Very feeble, very deaf; but she will be delighted to see you. There is no fear of her not remembering you, though she was quite lost when Mrs. Egremont came in yesterday.’

‘Mrs. Egremont!’ he repeated with a little start.

Mrs. Mark. Ah! we have got used to the name—the Honourable Mrs. Egremont, as the community insist on calling her. What a sunny creature she is!

‘And Miss Egremont, what do you hear of her?’

‘She writes long letters, poor child. I hope she is fairly happy. Are you come home for good, or is this only a visit?’

‘I have no intention of returning. I have been winding up my good cousin’s affairs at Melbourne.’

Mary’s heart bounded again with a sense of joy, comfort, and protection; but she did not long keep Mr. Dutton to herself, for every third person they met gladly greeted him, and they were long in getting to St. Ambrose’s Road, now dominated by a tall and beautiful spire, according to the original design. They turned and looked in at the pillared aisles, stained glass, and handsome reredos.

‘Very different from our struggling days,’ said Mr. Dutton.

‘Yes,’ said Mary, with half a sigh. ‘There’s the new vicar,’ as he passed with a civil nod. ‘He has three curates, and a house of Sisters, and works the parish excellently.’

‘You don’t speak as if you were intimate.’

‘No. His womankind are rather grand—quite out of our beat; and in parish work I am only an estimable excrescence. It is very well that I am not wanted, for Miss Headworth requires a good deal of attention, and it is only the old Adam that regrets the days of importance. Ah, do you see?’

They were passing Mr. Dutton’s old home. On the tiny strip of lawn in front was a slender black figure, with yellow hair, under a tiny black hat, dragg-

ing about a wooden horse whereon was mounted a sturdy boy of two, also yellow-locked and in deep mourning under his Holland blouse.

'Billy-boy is riding to meet his daddy!' was merrily called out both by mother and son before they perceived the stranger.

'Mr. Dutton,' said Mary.

Annaple bowed, but did not put out her hand, and such a flush was on her face that Miss Nugent said, 'I am sure that is too much for you!'

'Oh no——' she began; but 'Allow me,' said Mr. Dutton, and before she could refuse he was galloping round and round the little lawn, the boy screaming with delight as Monsieur raced with them.

'So he is come!' she said in a low doubtful voice to Mary.

'Yes. He has met Mr. Greenleaf in London. I always think he has the contrary to the evil eye. Whatever he takes in hand rights itself.'

'I'll hope so. Oh, thank you! Billy-boy, say thank you! What a ride you have had!'

'Why are they in such deep mourning?' asked Mr. Dutton, after they had parted.

'Oh, did you not know! for good old Lady Ronnisglen. She had a bad fall about two years ago, and never left her bed again; and this last autumn she sank away.'

'They have had a great deal of trouble, then. I saw the death of Canon Egremont in the *Times* soon after I went out to Australia.'

'Yes; he had heart disease, and died quite suddenly.

The living is given to Mr. Condamine, who married the eldest daughter, and the widow is gone to live under the shadow of Redcastle Cathedral.'

Therewith Miss Nugent opened her own door, and Miss Headworth was soon made aware of the visitor. She was greatly changed, and had the indescribable stony look that tells of paralysis; and though she knew Mr. Dutton, and was delighted to see him, his presence made her expect to see Alice and Nuttie come in, though she soon recollected herself and shed a few helpless tears. Then—in another mood—she began to display with pride and pleasure the photographs of 'Alice's dear little boy.' She had a whole series of them, from the long-clothed babe on his sister's knee to the bright little fellow holding a drum—a very beautiful child, with a striking resemblance to his mother, quite startling to Mr. Dutton, especially in the last, which was coloured, and showed the likeness of eyes and expression.

'Nuttie always sends me one whenever he is taken,' said the old lady. 'Dear Nuttie! It is very good for her. She is quite a little mother to him.'

'I was sure it would be so,' said Mr. Dutton.

'Yes,' said Mary, 'he is the great interest and delight of her life. Her letters are full of his little sayings and doings.'

'Is she at home now?'

'No; at Brighton. Her father seems to have taken a dislike to Bridgefield since his brother's death, and only goes there for a short time in the shooting season.'

He has taken a lease of a house in London, and spends most of the year there.'

'Ah!' as she showed him the address, 'that is near the old house where I used to stay with my grand-aunt. We thought it altogether in the country then, but it is quite absorbed now, and I have dazzling offers from building companies for the few acres of ground around it. Have you seen her?'

'Oh no; I believe she is quite necessary to her father. I only hear of her through Lady Kirkaldy, who has been very kind to her, but, I am sorry to say, is now gone with her Lord to the East. She says she thinks that responsibility has been very good for Nuttie; she is gentler and less impetuous, and a good deal softened by her affection for the child.'

'She was certain to develop. I only dreaded what society her father might surround her with.'

'Lady Kirkaldy says that all has turned out better than could have been expected. You see, as she says, Mr. Egremont has been used to good women in his own family, and would not like to see her in a slangy fast set. All her own gaieties have been under Lady Kirkaldy's wing, or that of Mrs. William Egremont's relations, and only in a quiet moderate way. Her father gets his own old set about him, and they have not been very choice, but they are mostly elderly men, and gentlemen, and know how to behave themselves to her. Indeed, her cousin Blanche, who was here in the winter, gave us to understand that Ursula knows how to take care of herself, and gets laughed at as

rather an old maidish model of propriety, if you can believe it of your little Nuttie.'

'I could quite believe in her on the defensive, unprotected as she is.'

'What did that young lady—Miss Blanche—tell us about that gentleman, Mary?' said Miss Headworth, hearing and uttering what Miss Nugent hoped had passed unnoticed.

'Oh, I think that was all gossip!' returned Mary, 'and so I am sure did the Mark Egremonts. She said there was one of Mr. Egremont's friends, Mr. Clarence Fane, I think she called him, rather younger than the others, who, she was pleased to say, seemed smitten with Nuttie, but I have heard nothing more about it, and Mrs. Mark scouted the idea,' she added in haste, as she saw his expression vary in spite of himself.

'Do you see much of your neighbours?'

'We are both too busy to see much of one another, but we have our little talks over the wall. What a buoyant creature she is. It seems as if playfulness was really a sustaining power in her, helping her to get diversion out of much that others might stumble at. You know perhaps that when she arrived the work-people had got up a beautiful parasol for her, white, with a deep fringe and spray of rowan. Little Susie Gunner presented her with it, and she was very gracious and nice about it. But then what must Mr. Goodenough do but dub it the Annabella sunshade, and blazon it, considerably vulgarised, in all the railway stations, and magazines.'

‘I know! I had the misfortune to see it in the station at Melbourne; and my mind misgave me from that hour.’

‘Her husband was prepared to be very angry, but she fairly laughed him out of it, made all sorts of fun out of the affair, declared it her only opening to fame, and turned it into a regular joke; so that indeed the Greenleafs, who were vexed at the matter, and tried to apologise, were quite perplexed in their turn, and not at all sure that the whole concern was not being turned into ridicule.’

‘I wonder it did not make him cut the connection,’ said Mr. Dutton, muttering ‘I only wish it had.’

‘Mrs. Greenleaf is very funny about her,’ added Mary, ‘proud of the Honourable Mrs. Egremont, as they insist on calling her, yet not quite pleased that she should be the junior partner’s wife; and decidedly resenting her hardly going into society at all, though I really don’t see how she could; for first there was the Canon’s death, and then just after the boy was born came Lady Ronnisglen’s accident, and for the next year and a half there was constant attendance on her. They fitted up a room on the ground floor for her, the one opening into your drawing-room, and there they used to sit with her. I used to hear them reading to her and singing to her, and they were always as merry as possible, till last autumn, when something brought on erysipelas, and she was gone almost before they took alarm. The good little daughter was beaten down then, really ill for a week;

but if you can understand me, the shock seemed to tell on her chiefly bodily, and though she was half broken-hearted when her husband in a great fright brought me up to see her, and say whether her sister should be sent for, she still made fun of him, and described the impossible advice they would bring on themselves. I had to take care of her while he went away to the funeral in Scotland, and then I learnt indeed to like her and see how much there is in her besides laughter.'

'Did the old lady leave them anything?'

'I believe she had nothing to leave. Her jointure was not much, but I am sure they miss that, for Mrs. Egremont has parted with her nurse, and has only a little girl in her stead, driving out the perambulator often herself, to the great scandal of the Greenleafs, though she would have one believe it is all for want of occupation.'

'Do you think they have taken any alarm?'

'There's no judging from her joyous surface, but I have thought him looking more careworn and anxious than I liked. Mr. Dutton, don't answer if I ought not to ask, but is it true that things are going wrong? I know you have been seeing Mr. Greenleaf, so perhaps you are in his confidence and cannot speak.'

'Tell me, what is known or suspected?'

'Just this, that Mr. Goodenough has been the ruin of the concern. He has been quite different ever since his voyage to America. You were gone, old Mr. Greenleaf has been past attending to business ever

since he had that attack, and George Greenleaf has been playing the country squire at Horton Bishop, and not looking after the office work, and Mr. Egremont was inexperienced. One could see, of course, that the whole character of the business was changed—much more advertising, much more cheap and flashy work—to be even with the times, it was said, but the old superior hands were in despair at the materials supplied to them, and the scamped work expected. You should have heard old Thorpe mourning for you, and moralising over the wickedness of this world. His wife told me she really thought he would go melancholy mad if he did not leave the factory, and he has done so. They have saved enough to set up a nice little shop at Monks Horton.'

'I must go and see them! Good old Thorpe! I ought never to have put those poor young things into the firm when I ceased to have any control over it. I shall never forgive myself——'

'Nothing could seem safer then! No one could have guessed that young Mr. Greenleaf would be so careless without his father to keep him up to the mark, nor that Mr. Goodenough should alter so much. Is it very bad? Is there worse behind? Speculation, I suppose——'

'Of course. I do not see to the bottom of it yet; poor George seemed to reckon on me for an advance, but I am afraid this is more than a mere temporary depression, such as may be tided over, and that all that can be looked to is trying to save honourable names

by an utter break up, which may rid them of that—that—no, I won't call him a scoundrel. I thought highly of him once, and no doubt he never realised what he was doing.'

Before the evening was far advanced Mark Egremont knocked at the door, and courteously asked whether Mr. Dutton could be spared to him for a little while. Mary Nugent replied that she was just going to help Miss Headworth to bed, and that the parlour was at their service for a private interview, but Mark answered, 'My wife is anxious to hear. She knows all that I do, and is quite prepared to hear whatever Mr. Dutton may not object to saying before her.'

So they bade good-night to Mary, and went on together to the next house, Mr. Dutton saying 'You have much to forgive me, Mr. Egremont; I feel as if I had deserted the ship just as I had induced you to embark in it.'

'You did not guess how ill it would be steered without you,' returned Mark, with a sigh. 'Do not fear to speak out before my wife, even if we are sinking. She will hear it bravely, and smile to the last.'

The room which Mr. Dutton entered was not like the cabin of a sinking ship, nor, as in his own time, like the well-ordered apartment of a bachelor of taste. Indeed, the house was a great puzzle to Monsieur, who entered by invitation, knowing his way perfectly, thinking himself at home after all his travels, and then missing his own particular mat, and sniffing

round at the furniture. It was of the modified æsthetic date, but arranged more with a view to comfort than anything else, and by the light of the shaded lamp and bright fire was pre-eminently home-like, with the three chairs placed round the hearth, and bright-haired Annaple rising up from the lowest with her knitting to greet Mr. Dutton, and find a comfortable lair for Monsieur.

‘Miss Nugent says that you set everything right that you do but look at, Mr. Dutton,’ she said; ‘so we are prepared to receive you as a good genius to help us out of our tangle.’

Mr. Dutton was afraid that the tangle was far past unwinding, and of course the details, so far as yet known, were discussed. There was, in truth, nothing for which Mark could be blamed. He had diligently attended to his office-work, which was mere routine, and, conscious of his own inexperience, and trusting to the senior partners, he had only become anxious at the end of the year, when he perceived Goodenough’s avoidance of a settlement of accounts, and detected shuffling. He had not understood enough of the previous business to be aware of the deterioration of the manner of dealing with it, though he did think it scarcely what he expected. If he had erred, it was in acting too much as a wheel in the machinery, keeping his thoughts and heart in his own happy little home, and not throwing himself into the spirit of the business, or the ways of those concerned in it, so that he had been in no degree a controlling power. He had allowed

his quality of gentleman to keep him an outsider, instead of using it to raise the general level of the transactions, so that the whole had gone down in the hands of the unscrupulous Goodenough.

Annaple listened and knitted quietly while the affairs were explained on either hand. Mark had had one serious talk with George Greenleaf, and both had had a stormy scene with Goodenough. Then Mr. Dutton had telegraphed his arrival, and Greenleaf had met him in London, with hopes, bred of long and implicit trust, that his sagacity and perhaps his wealth would carry the old house through the crisis.

But Mr. Dutton, though reserving his judgment till the books should have been thoroughly examined and the liabilities completely understood, was evidently inclined to believe that things had gone too far, and that the names of Greenleaf and Egremont could only be preserved from actual dishonour by going into liquidation, dissolving partnership, and thus getting quit of Goodenough.

Mark listened resignedly, Annaple with an intelligence that made Mr. Dutton think her the more clear-headed of the two, though still she could not refrain from her little jokes. 'I'm sure I should not mind how liquid we became if we could only run off clear of Goodenough,' she said.

'You know what it means?' said her husband.

'Oh yes, I know what it means. It is the fine word for being sold up. Well, Mark, never mind, we are young and strong, and it will not be a bit the

worse for the Billy-boy in the end to begin at the bottom of everything.'

'I hope—may I ask—is everything embarked in the poor old firm?' said Mr. Dutton with some hesitation.

'All that is mine,' said Mark, with his elbow on the table and his chin on his hand.

'But I've got a hundred a year, charged on poor old Ronnisglen's estate,' said Annaple. 'All the others gave theirs up when they married, and I wanted to do so, but my dear mother would not let me; she said I had better try how I got on first. Think of that, Mark, a hundred a year! Why, old Gunner or Thorpe would think themselves rolling in riches if they only heard that they had a hundred a year!'

'You won't find it go far!'

'Yes, I shall, for I shall make you live on porridge, with now and then a sheep's head for a treat! Besides, there will be something to do. It will be working up again, you know. But seriously, Mr. Dutton, I have some things here of my dear mother's that really belong to Ronnisglen, and I was only keeping till he comes home. Should not they be got out of the way?'

'My dear, we are not come to that yet! I hope it may be averted!' cried Mark.

But Mr. Dutton agreed with the young wife that it would be much better to send these things away before their going could excite suspicion. There was only a tiny silver saucepan, valued as a gift of 'Queen' Clementina to an ancestress, also a silver teapot and

some old point, and some not very valuable jewellery, all well able to go into a small box, which Mr. Dutton undertook to deposit with Lord Ronnisglen's bankers. He was struck with the scrupulous veracity with which Annaple decided between what had become her own property and the heirlooms, though what she claimed might probably be sacrificed to the creditors.

Mark could hardly endure to see what made the crisis so terribly real. 'That I should have brought you to this!' he said to his wife, when their visitor had at length bidden them good-night.

'If we begin at that work,' said Annaple, 'it was I who brought you! I have often thought since it was rather selfish not to have consented to your helping poor Ursula with her heavy handful of a father! It was all money grubbing and grabbing, you see, and if we had thought more of our neighbour than ourselves we might have been luxuriating at the Home Farm, or even if your uncle had quarrelled with you, he would not have devoured your substance. I have thought so often, ever since I began to see this coming.'

'My dear child, you don't mean that you have seen this coming!'

'My prophetic soul! Why, Mark, you have as good as inferred it over and over again. I've felt like scratching that Badenough whenever I met him in the street. I must indulge myself by calling him so for once in strict privacy.'

'You have guessed it all the time, while I only thought how unconscious you were.'

‘Not to say stupid, considering all you told me. Besides, what would have been the use of howling and moaning and being dismal before the time? For my part, I could clap my hands even now at getting rid of Goodenough, and his jaunty, gracious air! Come, Mark, it won’t be so bad after all, you’ll see.’

‘Nothing can be “so bad,” while you are what you are, my Nan.’

‘That’s right. While we have each other and the Billy-boy, nothing matters much. There’s plenty of work in us both, and that good man will find it for us; or if he doesn’t, we’ll get a yellow van, and knit stockings, and sell them round the country. How jolly that would be! Imagine Janet’s face. There, that’s right,’ as her mimicry evoked a smile, ‘I should be ashamed to be unhappy about this, when our good name is saved, and when there is a blessing on the poor,’ she added in a lower voice, tenderly kissing her husband’s weary brow.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BOY OF EGREMONT.

‘And the boy that walked beside me,
He could not understand
Why, closer in mine, ah, closer,
I press’d his warm soft hand.’—LONGFELLOW.

THE agony of a firm like Greenleaf, Goodenough, and Co. could not be a rapid thing, and Mr. Dutton lived between London and Micklethwayte for several weeks, having much to endure on all sides. The senior partners thought it an almost malicious and decidedly ungrateful thing in him not to throw in his means, or at any rate, offer his guarantee to tide them over their difficulties. Goodenough’s tergiversations and concealments needed a practised hand and acute head to unravel them, and often deceived Mr. Greenleaf himself; and when, for a time, he was convinced that the whole state was so rotten that a crash was inevitable, his wife’s lamentations and complaints of Mr. Dutton would undo the whole, and it was as if he were doing them an injury that the pair accepted the comfortable prospect he was able to offer them in Australia.

He would have made the like proposal to the Egremonts, but found that Mark held himself bound by his promise to his father not to emigrate, and thought of some kind of office-work. Before trying to procure this for him, however, Mr. Dutton intended to see his uncle, and try whether the agency, once rejected, could still be obtained for him. Learning from Miss Nugent that the Egremonts were in town, he went up thither with the purpose of asking for an interview.

There was a new church in the immediate neighbourhood of his house in a state of growth and development congenial to the St. Ambrose trained mind, and here Mr. Dutton, after old Micklethwayte custom, was attending the early matins, when, in the alternate verses of the psalm, he heard a fresh young voice that seemed to renew those days gone by, and looking across the central aisle his eyes met a pair of dark ones which gave a sudden glitter of gladness at the encounter. That was all he saw or cared to see. He did not take in the finished completeness of the very plain dark dress and hat, nor the womanly air of the little figure, until they clasped hands in the porch, and in the old tones Nuttie exclaimed: 'I've been hoping you would come to London. How is Monsieur?'

'In high health, thank you, the darling of the steamer both going and coming. I hope your charges are well?'

'My father is tolerable, just as usual, and my little Alwyn is getting more delicious every day. He will

be so delighted to see Monsieur. I have told him so many stories about him !'

'Do you think I may call on Mr. Egremont ?'

'Oh do ! He is ready to be called on between two and three, and we always have Wynn timer downstairs then, so that you will see him too. And you have been at Micklethwayte. I am afraid you found a great change in Aunt U rsel.'

'Yes ; but she is very peaceful and happy.'

'And I have to leave her altogether to dear excellent Miss Nugent. It seems very, very wrong, but I cannot help it ! And how about Mark and Annaple ?'

'I think she is the bravest woman I ever met.'

'Then things are really going badly with the dear old firm ?'

'I am hoping to talk to Mr. Egremont about it.'

'Ah !'

Nuttie paused. Towards Mr. Dutton she always had a stronger impulse of confidence than towards any one else she had ever met ; but she felt that he might think it unbecoming to say that she had perceived a certain dislike on her father's part towards Mark ever since the rejection of the agency and the marriage, which perhaps was regarded as a rejection of herself. He had a habit of dependence on Mark, which resulted in personal liking, when in actual contact, but in absence the distaste and offence always revived, fostered, no doubt, by Gregorio ; and Canon Egremont's death had broken the link which had

brought them together. However, for his brother's sake, and for the sake of the name, the head of the family might be willing to do something. It was one of Nuttie's difficulties that she never could calculate on the way her father would take any matter. Whether for better or for worse, he always seemed to decide in diametrical opposition to her expectation. And, as she was certainly less impetuous and more dutiful, she parted with Mr. Dutton at her own door without any such hint.

These three years had been discipline such as the tenderest, wisest hand could not have given her, though it had been insensible. She had been obliged to attend to her father and watch over her little brother, and though neither task had seemed congenial to her disposition, the honest endeavour to do them rightly had produced the affection born of solicitude towards her father, and the strong warm tenderness of the true mother-sister towards little Alwyn.

Ursula Egremont was one of those natures to which responsibility is the best training. If she had had any one to guard or restrain her, she might have gone to the utmost limits before she yielded to the curb. As it was, she had to take care of herself, to bear and forbear with her father, to walk warily with her household, and to be very guarded with the society into which she was thrown from time to time. It was no sudden change, but one brought about by experience. An outbreak of impatience or temper towards her father was sure to be followed by his galling sneer, or

by some mortification to her desires ; any act of mismanagement towards the servants brought its own punishment ; and if she was tempted by girlish spirits to relax the quiet, stiff courtesy which she observed towards her father's guests, there followed jests, or semi-patronage, or a tone of conversation that offended her, and made her repent it. Happily, Mr. Egremont did not wish her to be otherwise. One day, when she had been betrayed into rattling and giggling, he spoke to her afterwards with a cutting irony which bitterly angered her at the moment, and which she never forgot. Each irksome duty, each privation, each disappointment, each recurrence of the sweeping sense of desolation and loneliness had had one effect—it had sent her to her knees. She had no one else to go to. She turned to her Father in heaven. Sometimes, indeed, it was in murmuring and complaint at her lot, but still it was to Him and Him alone, and repentance sooner or later came to aid her, while refreshments sprang up around her—little successes, small achievements, pleasant hours, tokens that her father was pleased or satisfied, and above all, the growing charms of little Alwyn.

The special grievance, Gregorio's influence, had scarcely dwelt on her at first as it had done on her mother. The man had been very cautious for some time, knowing that his continuance in his situation was in the utmost jeopardy, and Mr. Egremont had, in the freshness of his grief for his wife, abstained from relapsing into the habits from which she had weaned him.

When, however, the Canon was dead, and his son at a distance, Gregorio began to feel more secure, and in the restless sorrow of his master over the blow that had taken away an only brother, he administered soothing drugs under another name, so that Ursula, in her inexperience, did not detect what was going on, and still fancied that the habit had been renounced. All she did know was that it was entirely useless for her to attempt to exert any authority over the valet, and that the only way to escape insolently polite disobedience was to let him alone. Moreover, plans to which her father had agreed, when broached by her, had often been overthrown after his valet had been with him. It was a life full of care and disappointment, yet there was a certain spring of trust that kept Ursula's youth from being dimmed, and enabled her to get a fair share of happiness out of it, though she was very sorry not to be more at Bridgefield, where she could have worked with all her heart with May Condamine. Moreover, Lady Kirkaldy's absence from London was a great loss to her, for there was no one who was so kind or so available in taking her into society; and Nuttie, though mistress of her father's house, was not yet twenty-two, and strongly felt that she must keep within careful bounds, and not attempt to be her own chaperon.

But the very sight of her old friend, and the knowledge that he was in the neighbourhood, filled her heart with gladness, and seemed like a compensation for everything. Mr. Egremont was in a gracious

mood, and readily consented to see Mr. Dutton—the friend who had been so pleasant and helpful at Paris—and Nuttie gave her private instructions to the footman to insure his admittance.

His card was brought in just as the father and daughter were finishing luncheon, and he was received in Mr. Egremont's sitting-room, where the first civilities had hardly passed before the door was opened, and in trotted the golden-haired boy, so beautiful a child that it would have been impossible not to look at him with delight, even for those to whom his dark eyes and sweet smile did not recall those that had once been so dear.

Mr. Egremont's voice took a fresh tone: 'Ah! here he comes, the old fellow'—and he held out his hands; but the boy was intent on his own purpose.

'Where's black doggie?' he asked in a silver-bell of a little voice, but lisping a good deal; 'Wyn got penny for him.'

'Wynn timer must be a good boy. Kiss papa first, and Mr. Dutton,' remonstrated the sister; and Alwyn obeyed so far as to submit to his father's embrace, and then raising those velvety eyes to the visitor's face, he repeated: 'Where black doggie. Wyn want to see him buy bun.'

'There! your fame has preceded you,' said Mr. Egremont, 'or rather your dog's.'

'You shall see him,' said Mr. Dutton, taking the pretty boy almost reverently on his knee, 'but he is at home now. I could not leave him out on the street, and I did not know if I might bring him in.'

'Oh, Mr. Dutton! as if Monsieur would not be

welcome,' cried the Nuttie of old times. 'I only wish I had stipulated for him, dear old fellow.'

'Wyn want to see him,' reiterated the child.

'May I take him to see the performance?' said Mr. Dutton. 'I live only at the corner of Berkshire Road, and there's a dairy just opposite where Monsieur has been allowed to keep up his accomplishment.'

Alwyn's legs, arms, and voice, were all excitement and entreaty; and Mr. Egremont himself proposed that they should all come and witness the feat; so Nuttie, in great glee, climbed the stairs with her little brother to get ready; and when she came down again, found the gentlemen deep, not in Mark Egremont's umbrellas, but in the gas and smoke grievances which had arisen since the lease of the house had been taken, and in which sympathy might be expected from a fellow-inhabitant of the district. Little Alwyn was, however, plainly the lord of the ascendant, and unused to see anything else attended to in his presence. He took possession of Mr. Dutton's hand, and his tongue went fast, nor did his father or sister seem to desire any better music. They reached an old-walled garden, with lilac and laburnum and horse-chestnut blossoming above, and showing a mass of greenery through the iron railing that surmounted the low wall on the street side, where Mr. Dutton halted and took out his key.

'Is this yours?' exclaimed Nuttie, 'I have so often wondered whose it could be.'

'Yes, it was a country-house when I was of the age of this little man, though you might not think it.'

‘The increase of London had not been on that side,’ said Mr. Egremont. ‘This must be a very valuable property!’

And Nuttie perceived that such an inheritance made Mr. Dutton much more in his eyes than an ex-umbrella-monger; but no sooner was the tall iron gate opened than Monsieur, beautifully shaved, with all his curly tufts in perfection, came bounding to meet his master, and Alwyn had his arms round the neck in a moment. Monsieur had in his time been introduced to too many children not to understand the situation, and respond politely; and he also recognised Ursula, and gave unmistakable proofs of being glad to see her.

Then the halfpenny was presented to him. He wagged his queer tail, smiled with his intelligent brown eyes, took it between his teeth, and trotted across the street in the most business-like way, the others following, but detaining the boy from keeping too close. They found the creature sitting upright, tapping the floor with his tail, the centre of rapturous admiration to all the customers already in the dairy shop. He received his bun, and demurely dropping on his front legs, walked back with it to his master, and crossed the road with it uneaten, rather to Alwyn’s disappointment, but Mr. Dutton said he would probably dispose of it in some hiding-place in the garden until his evening appetite came on. It was well he was a dog of moderation, for there was great temptation to repeat the entertainment more than was wholesome for him.

‘There, Wynn timer,’ said Nuttie in a voice of monition, ‘Monsieur doesn’t eat all his goodies at once, he keeps them for bedtime.’

It might be perceived that the over-supply of sweets was a matter of anxiety to the elder sister. To the nurse, who waited in readiness, Alwyn was consigned for his walk, while his father and sister accepted Mr. Dutton’s invitation to look round his domain. It would have been small in the country, but it was extensive for the locality, and there was a perfect order and trimness about the shaven lawn, the little fountain in the midst, the flower-beds gay with pansies, forget-me-nots, and other early beauties, and the freshly-rolled gravel paths, that made Nuttie exclaim : ‘Ah ! I should have known this for yours anywhere.’

‘I have not had much to do to it,’ he said. ‘My old aunts had it well kept up, even when they could only see it from their windows. Their old gardener still lives in the cottage behind the tool-house, though he is too infirm for anything but being wheeled about in the sun in their Bath-chair.’

‘You keep a large amount lying idle by retaining it as it is,’ said Mr. Egremont.

‘True, but it is well to preserve an oasis here and there.’

Nuttie knew well that it was not for himself alone, and as they entered the little conservatory, and her eye fell on the row of white hyacinths, the very scent carried her back to the old times, and her eyes grew moist while Mr. Dutton was cutting a bouquet for her in accordance with well-known tastes.

‘I shall put them in my room. It will feel like home,’ she said, and then she saw that she had said what her father did not like; for he was always sensitive as to any reference to her early life.

Mr. Dutton, however, took this opportunity of saying that he had been backwards and forwards to Micklethwayte several times this spring.

‘I hope you are well out of the concern there,’ said Mr. Egremont.

‘Thank you, sir; I have no share in it at present.’

‘So much the better!’

‘But I am very anxious about my friends.’

‘Ah!’ But Mr. Egremont’s attention was drawn off at the entrance of the house by a new-fashioned stove of which Mr. Dutton did the honours, conducting father and daughter into the drawing-room, where obvious traces of the old ladies remained, and thence into his own sitting-room, smelling pleasantly of Russia leather, and recalling that into which Nuttie had been wont, before her schooldays, to climb by the window, and become entranced by the illustrations of a wonderful old edition of *Télémaque*, picked up at Paris.

Mr. Dutton made them sit and rest, for this had been a good deal of exercise for Mr. Egremont; coffee was brought in, having been ordered on their arrival, and therewith Mr. Dutton entered on an exposition of the affairs of Greenleaf and Goodenough, which was listened to with a good deal of interest, though Nuttie could not quite detect whether it were

altogether friendly interests in Mark's misfortunes, or if there were not a certain triumph in the young man having run into trouble by rejecting his offer.

Mr. Dutton explained that his present object was to induce the friends of the family to prevent annoyance by preserving the furniture and personals at a valuation; and Mr. Egremont readily agreed to contribute to doing this, though he said the sisters and stepmother were well able also to do their share.

'And then to give the young people a fresh start,' added Mr. Dutton.

'There are some men who are always wanting fresh starts,' said Mr. Egremont, 'just as there are some vessels that are always unlucky. And if you observe, it is just those men who are in the greatest haste to hang an expensive wife and family round their necks.'

'I don't think poor Annable can be accused of being expensive, papa,' said Nuttie. 'Only think, when Wynn timer has two nurses always after him, her Willie has only the fraction of a little maid, who does all sorts of work besides.'

'Yes, I never saw more resolute and cheerful exertion than Mrs. Mark Egremont's,' said Mr. Dutton.

'She owes him something,' said Mr. Egremont, 'for she has been the ruin of him.'

'Of his worldly prospects in one sense,' said Mr. Dutton quietly; while Nuttie felt how much better and wiser an answer it was than the indignant denial that trembled on her tongue. 'There can be no doubt that they made a grievous mistake in their choice, and

I unfortunately was concerned in leading them into it ; but no one can see how they meet their troubles without great respect and admiration, and I am especially bound to seek for some new opening for them. I have little doubt that some office work might be found for him in London, but they are essentially country people, and it would be much better for them if he could have some agency. I suppose the situation you offered him before, sir, is filled up ?'

'Not really,' cried Nuttie. 'We have only a very common sort of uneducated bailiff, who would be much better with some one over him. You said so, papa.'

'Did he request you to apply to me ?' said Mr. Egremont sharply, looking at Mr. Dutton.

'Neither he nor she has the least idea of my intention ; I only thought, sir, you might be willing to consider how best to assist a nephew, who has certainly not been wanting either in industry or economy, and who bears your name.'

'Well, I will think it over,' said Mr. Egremont, rising to take leave.

The carriage had been bidden to await them at the door for their daily drive, and as Mr. Egremont leant back with the furs disposed over him he observed : 'That's a man who knows how to take care of himself. I wonder where he gets his coffee, I've not drunk any like it since I was at Nice.' And Nuttie, though well knowing that Mr. Dutton's love of perfection was not self-indulgence, was content to accept this as high approbation, and a good augury for Mark and An-

naple. Indeed, with Mr. Dutton settled near, and with the prospect of a daily walk from church with him, she felt such a complete content and trust as she had not known since she had been uprooted from Micklethwayte.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BRAVE HEART.

‘One furnace many times the good and bad may hold,
Yet what consumes the chaff will only cleanse the gold.’
Archbishop TRENCH.

NEVER was there a truer verse than that which tells us that in seeking duty we find pleasure by the way, and in seeking pleasure we meet pain. It might be varied to apply to our anticipations of enjoyment or the reverse. Ursula had embraced her lot as a necessity, and found it enlivened by a good many sunshiny hours; and when she looked upon Mr. Dutton’s neighbourhood as a continual source of delight and satisfaction, she found that it gave rise to a continual course of small disappointments.

In the first place, he did not walk home from church with her every morning. She looked for him in vain, even when she knew he was in town. He only appeared there on Sundays, and at intervals when he had some especial reason for speaking to her. At first she thought he must have grown lazy or out of health to have thus dropped his old Micklethwayte

habits, but after a time she discovered by accident that he frequented another church, open at a still earlier hour and a little farther off, and she was forced to come to the conclusion that he acted out of his characteristic precise scrupulosity, which would not consider it as correct for her to walk home every day with him. She chafed, and derided 'the dear old man' a little in her own mind, then ended with a sigh. Was there any one who cared so much about what was proper for her? And, after all, was he really older than Mr. Clarence Fane, whom everybody in her father's set called Clarence, or even Clare, and treated as the boy of the party, so that she had taken it as quite natural that he should be paired off with her. It was quite a discovery!

There was another and more serious disappointment. Mr. Egremont had not seemed disinclined to consider the giving the agency to Mark, and Nuttie had begun to think with great satisfaction of May Condamine's delight in welcoming him, and of the good influence that would be brought to bear on the dependents, when suddenly there came a coolness. She could trace the moment, and was sure that it was, when Gregorio became aware of what was intended. He had reason to dread Mark as an enemy, and was likely to wish to keep him at a distance; and it had been Ursula's great hope that an absolute promise might have been given before he heard of the plan; but Mr. Egremont was always slow to make up his mind, except when driven by a sudden impulse, and had never actually said that the post should be offered

to his nephew. Nuttie only detected the turn of the tide by the want of cordiality, the hums and haws, and by and by the resumption of the unkind ironical tone when Mark and Annable were mentioned; and at last, when she had been reading to him a letter from Mrs. William Egremont full of anxiety for the young people, and yet of trust in his kindness to them, he exclaimed, 'You've not been writing to her about this absurd proposal?'

'I have not mentioned any proposal at all. What do you mean?'

'Why, this ridiculous idea about the agency. As if I was going to put my affairs into the hands of a man who has made such a mull of his own.'

'But that was not Mark's fault, papa. He was junior, you know, and had no power over that Goodenough.'

'He ought, then! Never sail with an unlucky captain. No, no, Mark's honourable lady would not let him take the agency when he might have had it, and I am not going to let them live upon me now that they have nothing of their own.'

'Oh, papa, but you almost promised!'

'Almost!' he repeated with his ironical tone; 'that's a word capable of a good deal of stretching. This is what you and that umbrella fellow have made out of my not giving him a direct refusal on the spot. He may meddle with Mark's affairs if he chooses, but not with mine.'

Nuttie had learnt a certain amount of wisdom, and knew that to argue a point only made her father more

determined, so she merely answered, 'Very well;' adding in a meek voice, 'Their furniture, poor things!'

'Oh ay. Their umbrella friend is making a collection for them. Yes, I believe I said I would contribute.'

Hot blood surged up within Nuttie at the contemptuous tone, and she bit her lip to keep down the answer, for she knew Mr. Dutton intended to call the next afternoon for her father's ultimatum before going down to Micklethwayte, where the crisis was fast approaching, and she had so much faith in his powers that she dreaded to forestall him by an imprudent word. Alas, Gregorio must have been on his guard, for, though Nuttie was sure she heard her friend's ring at the usual time, no entrance followed. She went up to put on her habit to ride with her father, and when she came down Mr. Egremont held out a card with the name 'Philip Dutton,' and the pencilled request below to be allowed to see Mr. Egremont later in the day.

'He has been denied!' exclaimed she in consternation.

'Hein! Before we go out, sit down and write a note for me.' And he dictated—

'DEAR SIR—I will not trouble you to call again this afternoon, as I have decided on reflection that there is no employment on my estate suited to my nephew, Mark Egremont.

'As I understand that you are raising a family subscription for rescuing his furniture from the creditors, I enclose a cheque for £50 for the purpose.—I remain——'

'Yours—what—papa?' asked Ursula, with a trembling voice, full of tears.

'Yours, etc., of course. Quite intimate enough for an ex-umbrella-monger. Here, give it to me, and I'll sign it while you fill up the cheque for me.'

That such should be the first letter that Nuttie ever addressed to Mr. Dutton, since the round-hand one in 'which Miss Ursula wished Mr. Dutton to have the onner of a tee with me on my birthday, and I am your affected little Nuttie'!

She hoped to explain and lament the next morning, after church. He would surely come to talk it over with her; but he only returned a civil note with his receipt, and she did not see him again before his departure. She was greatly vexed; she had wanted so much to tell him how it was, and then came an inward consciousness that she would probably have told him a great deal too much.

Was it that tiresome prudence of his again that would think for her and prevent impulsive and indignant disclosures? It made her bring down her foot sharply on the pavement with vexation as she suspected that he thought her so foolish, and then again her heart warmed with the perception of self-denying care for her. She trusted to that same prudence for no delusive hopes having been given to Mark and his wife.

She did so justly. Mr. Dutton had thought the matter far too uncertain to be set before them. The Canoness's vague hopes had been the fruit of a hint

imprudently dropped by Nuttie herself in a letter to Blanche. She had said more to Miss Nugent, but Mary was a nonconductor. Mr. Dutton's heart sank as he looked at the houses, and he had some thoughts of going to her first for intelligence, but Annapple had spied him, and ran out to the gate to welcome him.

'Oh, Mr. Dutton, I'm so glad! Mark will be delighted.'

'Is he at home?'

'Oh no, at the office, wading through seas of papers with Mr. Greenleaf, but he will come home to eat in a quarter of an hour. So come in;' then, as her boy's merry voice and a gruffer one were heard, 'That's the bailiff. He is Willie's devoted slave.'

'I hoped to have been in time to have saved you that.'

'Well, I'm convinced that among the much maligned races are bailiffs. I wonder what I could get by an article on prejudice against classes! I was thinking how much beer I should have to lay in for this one, and behold he is a teetotaller, and besides that amateur nurse-maid, parlour-maid, kitchen-maid, etc. etc.——'

'What bailiff could withstand Mrs. Egremont? Perhaps you have tamed him?'

'Not I. The cook did that. Indeed I believe there's a nice little idyll going on in the kitchen, and besides he wore the blue ribbon, and was already a devoted follower of young Mr. Godfrey!'

'However, if the valuation is ready, I hope you

may be relieved from him, if you won't be too much concerned at the parting !'

'Mrs. Egremont told us that our people are very good to us,' said Annaple, 'and don't mean to send us out with nothing but a pack at our backs. It is very kind in them and in you, Mr. Dutton, to take the trouble of it! No, I'll not worry you with thanks. The great point is, hope for something for Mark to do. That will keep up his spirits best! Poor Mr. Greenleaf is so melancholy that it is all I can do to keep him up to the mark.'

'I have been making inquiries, and I have three possible openings, but I hardly like to lay them before you.'

'Oh, we are not particular about gentility! It is work we want, and if it was anything where I could help that would be all the better! I'm sure I only wonder there are so many as three. I think it is *somebody's* doing. Ah! there's Mark,' and she flew out to meet him. 'Mark!' she said, on the little path, 'here's the good genius, with three chances in his pocket. Keep him to luncheon. I've got plenty. Poor old man, how hot you look! Go and cool in the drawing-room, while I wash my son's face.'

And she disappeared into the back regions, while Mark, the smile she had called up vanishing from his face, came into the drawing-room, and held out a cordial, thankful hand to his friend, whose chief intelligence was soon communicated. 'Yes,' said Mark, when he heard the amount entrusted by the family to Mr. Dutton, 'that will save all my wife's

poor little household gods. Not that I should call them so, for I am sure she does not worship them. I don't know what would become of me if she were like poor Mrs. Greenleaf, who went into hysterics when the bailiff arrived, and has kept her room ever since. I sometimes feel as if nothing could hurt us while Annapple remains what she is.'

Mr. Dutton did not wonder that he said so, when she came in leading her little son, with his sunny hair newly brushed and shining, and carrying a little bouquet for the guest of one La Marque rosebud and three lilies of the valley.

'Take it to Mr. Dutton, Billy-boy; I think he knows how the flowers came into the garden. You shall have daddy's button-hole to take to him next. There, Mark, it is a pansy of most smiling countenance, such as should beam on you through your accounts. I declare, there's that paragon of a Mr. Jones helping Bessy to bring in dinner! Isn't it very kind to provide a man-servant for us?'

It might be rattle, and it might be inconsequent, but it was much pleasanter than hysterics. Billy-boy was small enough to require a good deal of attention at dinner, especially as he was more disposed to open big blue eyes at the stranger, than to make use of his spoon, and Annapple seemed chiefly engrossed with him, though a quick keen word at the right moment showed that she was aware of all that was going on, as Mark and Mr. Dutton discussed the present situation and future measures.

It was quite true that a man concerned in a failure was in great danger of being left out of the race for employment, and Mr. Dutton did not think it needful to mention the force of the arguments he was using to back his recommendation of Mark Egremont. The possibilities he had heard of were a clerkship at a shipping agent's, another at a warehouse in their own line, and a desk at an insurance office. This sounded best, but had the smallest salary to begin with, and locality had to be taken into account. Mr. Dutton's plan was, that as soon as Mark was no longer necessary for what Annaple was pleased to call the fall of the sere and withered leaf, the pair should come to stay with him, so that Mark could see his possible employers, and Annaple consider of the situations. They accepted this gratefully, Mark only proposing that she should go either to his stepmother or her own relations to avoid the final crisis.

'As if I would!' she exclaimed. 'What sort of a little recreant goose do you take me for?'

'I take you for a gallant little woman, ready to stand in the breach,' said Mark.

'Ah, don't flatter yourself! There is a thing I have not got courage to face—without necessity, and that's Janet's triumphant pity. Mr. Dutton lives rather too near your uncle, but he is a man, and he can't be so bad.'

This of course did not pass till Mr. Dutton had gone in to greet the ladies next door, to promise to

tell them of their child at length when the business hours of the day should be over.

Shall it be told? There was something in his tone—perfectly indefinable, with which he spoke of ‘Miss Egremont,’ that was like the old wistfully reverential voice in which he used to mention ‘Mrs. Egremont.’ It smote Mary Nugent’s quiet heart with a pang. Was it that the alteration from the old kindly fatherliness of regard to ‘little Nuttie’ revealed that any dim undefined hope of Mary’s own must be extinguished for ever; or was it that she grieved that he should again be wasting his heart upon the impracticable?

A little of both, perhaps, but Mary was as ready as ever to sympathise, and to rejoice in hearing that the impetuous child had grown into the forbearing dutiful woman.

CHAPTER IX.

A FRESH START.

‘DID you say that Mark and his wife were come to Springfield House?’

‘They come the day after to-morrow,’ answered Ursula. ‘Mark could not finish up the business sooner.’

‘Well, I suppose we must have them to dinner for once. He has made a fool of himself, but I won’t have the Canoness complaining that I take no notice of him; and it is easier done while he is there than when he has got into some hole in the City—that is if he ever gets anything to do.’

‘Mr. Dutton has several situations in view for him.’

‘In view. That’s a large order. Or does it mean living on Dutton and doing something nominal? I should think Dutton too old and sharp a hand for that, though he is quartering them on himself.’

‘I believe there is nothing Mr. Dutton would like better, if he thought it right for them, but I am quite sure Mark and Annapple would not consent.’

‘Ha, ha!’ and Mr. Egremont laughed. ‘Their nose is not brought to the grindstone yet! Say Saturday, then, Ursula.’

‘Am I to ask Mr. Dutton?’

‘Of course; I’m not going to have a *tête-à-tête* with Master Mark.’

So Ursula had the satisfaction of writing a more agreeable note to Mr. Dutton than her last, and her invitation was accepted, but to her vexation Mr. Egremont further guarded himself from anything confidential by verbally asking Mr. Clarence Fane on that very day, and as that gentleman was a baronet’s son, she knew she should fall to his lot at dinner; and though she was glad when this was the case at their ordinary parties, it was a misfortune on the present occasion. She had not seen Annapple since her marriage, except at the family gathering on the Canon’s death, when she was very much absorbed by the requirements of the stricken household; and Nuttie expected to see her in the same subdued condition. All Mr. Dutton had said or Mary Nugent had written about her courage and cheerfulness had given the impression of ‘patience smiling at grief,’ and in a very compassionate mood she started for a forenoon call at Springfield House; but, early as it was, nobody was at home, unless it might be the little boy, whose voice she thought she heard while waiting at the gate.

She was out driving with her father afterwards in the long summer evening, and only found Mark’s card on returning just in time to dress. It was a bright

glaring day, and she was sitting by the window, rather inattentively listening to Mr. Fane's criticism of a new performance at one of the theatres, when she heard the bell, and there entered the slight, bright creature who might still have been taken for a mere girl. The refined though pronounced features, the transparent complexion, crispy yellow hair and merry eyes, were as sunbeam-like as at the Rectory garden-party almost five years ago, and the black dress only marked the contrast, and made the slenderness of the figure more evident.

Mark looked older, and wrung his cousin's hand with a pressure of gratitude and feeling, but Annapple's was a light little gay kiss, and there was an entire unconsciousness about her of the *rôle* of poor relation. She made an easy little acknowledgment of the introduction of Mr. Fane, and, as Mr. Egremont appeared the next moment, exchanged greetings with him in a lively ordinary fashion.

This was just what he liked. He only wanted to forget what was unpleasant, and, giggling Scotch girl as she was, he was relieved to find that she could not only show well-bred interest in the surface matters of the time, but put in bright flashes of eagerness and originality, well seconded by Mr. Dutton. Mr. Fane was always a professor of small talk, and Nuttie had learnt to use the current change of society, so that though Mark was somewhat silent, the dinner was exceedingly pleasant and lively; and, as Mr. Fane remarked afterwards, he had been asked to enliven a

doleful feast to ruined kindred, he could only say he wished prosperity always made people so agreeable.

‘This is all high spirit and self-respect,’ thought Nuttie. ‘Annaple is talking as I am, from the teeth outwards. I shall have it out with her when we go upstairs! At any rate my father is pleased with her!’

Nuttie made the signal to move as soon as she could, and as they went upstairs, put her arm round the slim waist and gave a sympathetic pressure, but the voice that addressed her had still the cheery ring that she fancied had been only assumed.

‘I’m sorry I missed you, but we set out early and made a day of it; and oh! we’ve been into such funny places as I never dreamt of! You didn’t see my boy?’

‘No. I thought I heard him. I must see him to-morrow.’

‘And I must see yours. May it not be a pleasure to-night? I’ve no doubt you go and gloat over him at night.’

‘Well, I do generally run up after dinner; but after your day, I can’t think of dragging you up all these stairs.’

‘Oh, that’s nothing! Only you see it *is* jollier to have my Billy-boy in the next room.’

They were mounting all the time, and were received in the day nursery by the old Rectory nurse, much increased in dignity, but inclined to be pathetic as she inquired after ‘Mr. Mark,’ while Annaple, like a little insensible being, answered with provoking complacency

as to his perfect health, and begged Mrs. Poole to bring Master Alwyn to play in the garden at Springfield with her Willie. In fact there was a general invitation already to Alwyn to play there, but his attendants so much preferred the society of their congeners in the parks that they did not avail themselves of it nearly as often as Ursula wished.

Little Alwyn asleep was, of course, a beautiful sight, with a precious old headless rabbit pressed tight to his cheek; Annapple's face grew tender as she looked at the motherless creature; and she admired him to any extent except saying that he excelled her own. Being more than a year the elder, there could be no rivalry as to accomplishments; but as soon as they were out of the nursery hush, Annapple laughed her way down again with tales of Billy-boy's wonder at his first experiences of travelling. They sat down among the plants in the balcony, as far from the lamps as possible, and talked themselves into intimacy over Micklethwayte. There are two Eden homes in people's lives, one that of later childhood, the other the first of wedded happiness, and St. Ambrose Road had the same halo to both of these; for both had been uprooted from it against their will; the chief difference being that Ursula could cast longing, lingering looks behind, while Annapple held herself resolutely steeled against sentiment, and would only turn it off by something absurd. Nothing was absolutely settled yet; Mark had been presenting himself at offices, and she had been seeing rooms and lodgings.

‘The insurance office sounds the best, and would be the least shock to our belongings,’ said Annapple; ‘but it seems to lead to nothing. He would not get on unless we had capital to invest, and even if we had any, you wouldn’t catch us doing that again!’

‘Does Mr. Dutton advise that?’

‘No, he only thought we should like it better; but we are quite past caring for people’s feelings in the matter. They couldn’t pity us worse than they do. I incline to Stubbs and Co. One of them was once in the Greenleaf office, and has a regard for anything from thence; besides Mark would have something to do besides desk work. He would have to judge of samples, and see to the taking in and storing of goods. He does know something about that, and I’m sure it would agree with him better than an unmitigated high stool, with his nose to a desk.’

‘I should like it better.’

‘That’s right! Now I have got some one to say so. Besides, rising is possible, if one gets very useful. I mean to be Mrs. Alderman, if not my Lady Mayoress, before we have done. Then they have a great big almost deserted set of rooms over the warehouse, where we might live and look after the place.’

‘Oh! but should you like that?’

‘Mr. Dutton wants us to live out in some of the suburban places, where it seems there is a perfect population of clerks’ families in semi-detached houses. He says we should save Mark’s railway fare, rent, and all in doctors’ bills. But people, children and all, do live

and thrive in the City ; and I think Mark's health will be better looked after if I am there to give him his mid-day bite and sup, and brush him up, than if he is left to cater for himself; and as to exercise for the Billy-boy, 'tis not so far to the Thames Embankment. The only things that stagger me are the blacks ! I don't know whether life is long enough to be after the blacks all day long, but perhaps I shall get used to them !'

'Well, I think that would be worse.'

'Perhaps it would ; and at any rate, if the blacks do beat me, we could move. Think, no rent, nor rates, nor taxes—that is an inducement to swallow—no—to contend with, any number of blackamoors, isn't it? even if they settle on the tip of Billy-boy's nose.'

'I could come to see you better there than out in a suburb,' said Nuttie. 'But what do these rooms look out upon ?'

'On one side into their own court, on the other into Wulstan Street—a quiet place on the whole—all walls and warehouses ; and there's an excellent parish church, Mr. Underwood's ; so I think we might do worse.'

Nuttie was very sorry that the gentlemen came up, and Mr. Fane wandered out and began asking whether they were going to the rose show. Somehow on that evening she became conscious that Annapple looked at her and Mr. Fane rather curiously ; and when they met again the next day, and having grown intimate over the introduction of the two little boys, were driving out together, there were questions about whether she saw much of him.

‘Oh, I don’t know! He is the nicest, on the whole, of papa’s friends; he can talk of something besides’—Nuttie paused over her ‘besides,’—‘horsey-ness, and all that sort of thing—he is not so like an old satyr as some of them are; and so he is a resource.’

‘I see. And you meet him elsewhere, don’t you, in general society?’

‘I don’t go out much now that Lady Kirkaldy is not in town; but he always seems to turn up everywhere that one goes.’

‘Ursula, I’m very glad of that tone of yours. I was afraid——’

‘Afraid of what?’ cried Nuttie in a defiant tone.

‘That you liked him, and he is not really nice, Nuttie. Mark knows all about him; and so did I when I lived with the Delmars.’

Nuttie laughed rather bitterly. ‘Thank you, Annapple. As if I *could* care for that man—or he for me, for that matter! I know but too well,’ she added gravely, ‘that nobody nice is ever intimate at home.’

‘I beg your pardon. I would not have worried you about it, only I think you must take care, Nuttie for Blanche mentioned it to us last winter.’

‘Blanche is an arrant gossip! If she saw a grandfather and great grandmother gossiping she would say they were going to be married.’

‘Yes, as Mark says, one always swallows Blanche with a qualification.’

‘You may be quite sure, Annapple, that nothing like

that will ever be true about me ! Why, what would ever become of my poor little Wyn if I was so horrid as to want to go and marry ?'

She said it with an ineffable tone of contempt, just like the original Nuttie, who seemed to be recalled by association with Annapple.

That sojourn of Mark and his wife at Springfield House was a bright spot in that summer. If it had been only that Annapple's presence gave the free *entrée* to such an island of old Micklethwayte, it would have been a great pleasure to her ; but there was besides the happiness of confidence and unrestraint in their society, a restful enjoyment only to be appreciated by living the guarded life of constraint that was hers. She was so seldom thrown among people whom she could admire and look up to. Annapple told her husband of Nuttie's vehement repudiation of any intention of marriage. 'I am sure she meant it,' she observed, 'it was only a little too strong. I wonder if that poor youth who came to her first ball, and helped to pick us out of the hole in Bluepost Bridge, had anything to do with it.'

Annapple had an opportunity of judging. Mr. Dutton would not have brought about a meeting which might be painful and unsettling to both ; but one afternoon, when Nuttie was 'off duty' with her father, and had come in to share Annapple's five o'clock tea, Gerard Godfrey, looking the curate from head to foot, made his appearance, having come up from the far east, about some call on Mr. Dutton's purse.

The two shook hands with pleased surprise, and a little heightening of colour, but that was all. Nuttie had been out to luncheon, and was dressed 'like a mere fashionable young lady' in his eyes; and when, after the classes and clubs and schools of his district had been discussed, he asked, 'And I suppose you are taking part in everything here?'

'No, that I can't!'

'Indeed! I know Porlock, the second curate here very well, and he tells me that his vicar has a wonderful faculty of finding appropriate work for every one. Of course you know him?'

'No, I don't;' said Nuttie.

'Miss Egremont *has* her appropriate work,' said Mr. Dutton, and the deacon felt himself pushed into his old position at Micklethwayte. He knew the clergy of the district very well, and how persistently either Mr. Egremont, or perhaps Gregorio, prevented their gaining admittance at his house; and he guessed, but did not know, that Nuttie could not have got into personal intercourse with them without flat disobedience.

Annaple threw herself into the breach, and talked of St. Wulstan's; and the encounter ended, leaving the sense of having drifted entirely away from one another, and being perfectly heart whole, though on the one hand Ursula's feeling was of respect and honour; and Gerard's had a considerable element of pity and disapprobation.

'No!' said Annaple when they were gone, 'he will not cry like the kloarek in the Breton ballad who

wetted three great missals through with his tears at his first mass. He is very good, I am sure, but he is a bit of a prig !'

'It is very hard to youth to be good without priggishness,' said Mr. Dutton. 'Self-assertion is necessary, and it may easily be carried too far.'

'Buttresses are useful, but they are not beauties,' rejoined Annaple.

The warehouse arrangement was finally adopted, and after the three weeks necessary for the cleaning and fitting of their floor, and the bringing in of their furniture, Mark and Annaple began what she termed 'Life among the Blacks.'

Nuttie had great designs of constantly seeing Annaple, sending her supplies from the gardens and preserves at Bridgefield, taking her out for drives, and cultivating a friendship between Alwyn and Willie, who had taken to each other very kindly on the whole. They could not exactly understand each other's language, and had great fights from time to time over toys, for though there was a year between them they were nearly equal in strength; but they cared for each other's company more than for anything else, were always asking to go to one another, and roared when the time of parting came; at least Alwyn did so unreservedly, for Nuttie had begun to perceive with compunction that Billy-boy was much the most under control, and could try to be good at his mother's word, without other bribe than her kiss and smile. Ah! but he *had* a mother!

CHAPTER X.

NUTTIE'S PROSPECTS.

‘Three hundred pounds and possibilities.’

Merry Wives of Windsor.

AGAIN Nuttie's plans were doomed to be frustrated. It did not prove to be half so easy to befriend Mr. and Mrs. Mark Egremont as she expected, at the distance of half London apart, and with no special turn for being patronised on their side.

Her father took a fancy for almost daily drives with her in the park, because then he could have Alwyn with him; and the little fellow's chatter had become his chief amusement. Or if she had the carriage to herself, there was sure to be something needful to be done which made it impossible to go into the city to take up and set down Mrs. Mark Egremont; and to leave her to make her way home would be no kindness. So Nuttie only accomplished a visit once before going out of town, and that was by her own exertions—by underground railway and cab. Then she found all going prosperously; the blacks not

half so obnoxious as had been expected (of course not, thought Nuttie, in the middle of the summer); the look-out over the yard very amusing to Billy-boy; and the large old-fashioned pannelled rooms, so cool and airy that Annaple was quite delighted with them, and contemned the idea of needing a holiday. She had made them very pretty and pleasant with her Micklethwayte furniture, whose only fault was being on too small a scale for these larger spaces, but that had been remedied by piecing, and making what had been used for two serve for one.

The kitchen was on the same floor, close at hand, which was well, for Annaple did a good deal there, having only one young maid for the rougher work. She had taken lessons in the School of Cookery, and practised a good deal even at Micklethwayte, and she was proud of her skill and economy. Mark came in for his mid-day refreshment, and looked greatly brightened, as if the worst had come and was by no means so bad as he expected. All the time he had been at Mr. Dutton's he had been depressed and anxious, but now, with his boy on his knee, he was merrier than Nuttie had ever known him. As to exercise, there were delightful evening walks, sometimes early marketings in the long summer mornings before business began—and altogether it seemed, as Nuttie told her father afterwards, as if she had had a glimpse into a little City Arcadia.

'Hein!' said he, 'how long will it last?'

And Nuttie was carried away to Cowes, where he

had been persuaded to recur to his old favourite sport of yachting. She would have rather liked this if Clarence Fane had not been there too, and continually haunting them. She had been distrustful of him ever since Annaple's warning, and it became a continual worry to the motherless girl to decide whether his civil attentions really meant anything, or whether she were only foolish and ridiculous in not accepting them as freely and simply as before.

Of one thing she became sure, namely, that Gregorio was doing whatever in him lay to bring them together.

In this seaside temporary abode, great part of the London establishment was left behind, and Gregorio condescended to act the part of butler, with only a single man-servant under him, and thus he had much more opportunity of regulating the admission of visitors than at home; and he certainly often turned Mr. Fane in upon her, when she had intended that gentleman to be excluded, and contrived to turn a deaf or uncomprehending ear when she desired that there should be no admission of visitors unless her father was absolutely ready for them; and also there were times when he must have suggested an invitation to dinner, or a joining in a sail. No doubt Gregorio would have been delighted to see her married, and to be thus free from any counter influence over his master; but as she said to herself, 'Catch me! Even if I cared a rush for the man, I could not do it. I don't do my poor father much good, but as to leaving poor little

Alwyn in his clutches—I must be perfectly demented with love even to think of it.'

There was a desire on the valet's part to coax and court little Alwyn of which she felt somewhat jealous. The boy was naturally the pet of every one in the household, but he was much less out of Gregorio's reach in the present confined quarters, and she could not bear to see him lifted up in the valet's arms, allowed to play with his watch, held to look at distant sails on board the yacht, or even fed with sweet biscuits or chocolate creams.

The Rectory nursery had gone on a strict regimen and nurse was as angry as Nuttie herself; but there was no preventing it, for his father was not above cupboard love, and never resisted the entreaties that were always excited by the sight of dainties, only laughing when Nuttie remonstrated, or even saying, 'Never mind sister, Wynnie, she's got Mrs. Teachem's cap on,' and making the child laugh by pretending to smuggle in papers of sweets by stealth, apart from the severe eyes of sister or nurse.

That cut Nuttie to the heart. To speak of the evils for which self-indulgence was a preparation would only make her father sneer at her for a second Hannah More. It was a language he did not understand; and as to the physical unwholesomeness, he simply did not choose to believe it. She almost wished Alwyn would for once be sick enough to frighten him, but that never happened, nor would he accept nurse's statement of the boy being out of order.

Poor little Alwyn, he was less and less of an unmixed joy to her as he was growing out of the bounds of babyhood, and her notions of discipline were thwarted by her father's unbounded indulgence. To her the child was a living soul, to be trained for a responsible position here and for the eternal world beyond; to her father he was a delightful plaything, never to be vexed, whose very tempers were amusing, especially when they teased the serious elder sister.

'Oh father! do you ever think what it will come to?' Nuttie could not help saying one day when Mr. Egremont had prevented her from carrying him off in disgrace to the nursery for tying the rolls up in dinner napkins to enact Punch and Judy, in spite of his own endeavours to prevent the consequent desolation of the preparations.

Mr. Egremont shrugged his shoulders, and only observed, 'An excuse for a little home tyranny, eh? No, no, Wyn; we don't want tame little muffs here.'

Nuttie was obliged to run out of the room and—it must be confessed—dance and stamp out her agony of indignation and misery that her father should be bent on ruining his child, for she could not understand that all this was simply the instinctive self-indulgence of a drugged brain and dulled conscience.

She did, however, get a little support and help during a brief stay in the shooting season at Bridgefield. The Canoness was visiting the Condamines at the Rectory, and very soon understood all the state of things, more perhaps from her former nurse than

from Ursula. She was witness to one of those trying scenes, when Nuttie had been forbidding the misuse of a beautiful elaborate book of nursery rhymes, where Alwyn thought proper to 'kill' with repeated stabs the old woman of the shoe, when preparing to beat her progeny.

Just as she was getting the dagger paper-knife out of his little hand, and was diverting the pout on his swelling lip, his father became aware of the contest, and immediately the half conquered boy appealed to him. 'Sister naughty. Won't let Wynn timer kill cross ugly old woman, beating poor little children.'

'A fellow feeling! eh sister? Kill her away, boy, tear her out! Yes, give her to sister, and tell her that's the way to serve sour females! I declare, Ursula, she has got something of your expression.'

'Oh Wynn timer, Wynn timer!' said Nuttie, as he trotted up to her, 'is sister cross and ugly?' and she opened her arms to him.

'Sister, Wyn's own sister,' said the child affectionately, letting himself be kissed as he saw her grieved. 'She shan't be ugly old woman—ugly old woman go in fire.'

So perilously near the flame did he run to burn the old woman that Mr. Egremont shouted to her that in spite of all that humbug, she was perfectly careless of the child, although if she had withheld him she would probably have been blamed for thwarting him.

'Are you quite fair towards Ursula?' the aunt ventured to say when the girl had gone to dress for

walking down with her to the Rectory. 'It is hard on her, and not good for the boy to upset her authority.'

'Eh? Why, the girl is just a governess *manquée*, imbued with the spirit of all those old women who bred her up. A nice life the poor child would have of it, but for me.'

'I am sure she is devotedly attached to him.'

'Hein! So she thinks; but trust human nature for loving to wreak *discipline* on the child who has cut her out.'

'That is scarcely just, Alwyn. She was greatly relieved to be cut out.'

Mr. Egremont laughed at this, and his sister-in-law indignantly added with all the authority of a successful parent, 'Any way, nothing is so bad for a child as collision between the authorities in a family. Ursula is doing her best to act as a mother to that child, and it will be very injurious to him to interfere with her influences.'

'She's a good girl enough—gives very little trouble,' he allowed, 'but I'm not going to have the boy sat upon.'

As he spoke the words, Nuttie returned, and as soon as she was out of the house and out of hearing she exclaimed, 'Oh, Aunt Jane, you see how it is! How am I to prevent my boy from being utterly ruined?'

'I have been speaking to your father,' said Mrs. Egremont, 'but he does not seem to understand. Men don't. A child's faults and fancies seem such trifles

to them that they can't see the harm of indulging them, and, besides, they expect to be amused.'

'And is that poor dear little fellow to grow up spoilt?' said Nuttie, her eyes hot with unshed tears.

'I hope not, Ursula. I have great confidence in your influence, for I see you are a sensible girl.' This was astonishing praise from the Canoness. 'But you will throw away your chances if you keep up a continual opposition to what your father allows. It will be much less hurtful if Alwyn does get too much indulgence, and does a little unnecessary mischief, than for him to learn to think you the enemy of his pleasures, always wanting to check and punish him. Oh yes,' as Nuttie was going to answer, 'I know it is for his real good, but how is that baby to understand that? Indeed, my dear, I know how it is; I have gone through the same sort of thing with Basil.'

'Oh, it could never have been so bad!'

'No, of course not; but I have had to allow what I did not like for the child rather than let him see the shadow of difference of opinion between us, and I don't think it has done him any harm. The great point is that you should keep that poor little fellow's affection and respect, and make him unwilling to vex you.'

'That he is, dear little man. He is sorry when he sees sister grieved. He is always distressed if any thing is hurt or pained. He is really tender-hearted.'

'Yes, but boys are boys. That feeling will fail you if you work it too hard, and especially if you show

vexation at his pleasures. Keep that for real evils, like falsehood or cruelty.'

'Not for disobedience?'

'The evil of disobedience depends much more upon the authority of an order than on the child itself. If he disobeys you under his father's licence, you cannot make much of it. You have him a good deal to yourself?'

'Yes.'

'Then make use of that time to strengthen his principles and sense of right and wrong, as well as to secure his affections. My dear, I never saw a girl in a more difficult position than yours, but I see you are doing your utmost; only I am afraid the love of sedatives is the same.'

'Oh aunt, I did think he had given it up!'

'You are inexperienced, my dear. I see it in his eyes. Well, I'm afraid there is no stopping that.'

'Mother——' and Nuttie's voice was choked.

'She did her best, but you have not the same opportunities. It can't be helped with a man of that age. Mark might have done something, but he is out of the question now, poor fellow!'

'Indeed, Aunt Jane, I think Mark and Annaple are some of the happiest people I ever saw. I only wish my poor Alwyn were as forward as their Billy, but I'm not even allowed to teach him his letters, because once he cried over them.'

'I wish they had anything to fall back upon,' said Mrs. Egremont anxiously. 'They are so unwilling to let any one know of their difficulties that I feel as if

I never knew in what straits they may be. You will be sure to let me know, Ursula, if there is anything that I can do for them.'

That conversation was a great comfort and help to Nuttie, who was pleased to find herself treated as a real friend by her aunt, and perceived the wisdom of her advice. But the watching over the Mark Egremonts was a very difficult matter to accomplish, for when she went back to London she was warned that Billy had the whooping cough, rendering them unapproachable all the winter, so that she could only hear of them through Mr. Dutton, whom she continued to see occasionally whenever there was anything to communicate. Mr. Egremont rather liked him, and on meeting him in the street, would ask him casually in to dinner, or to make up a rubber, or play piquet, for he excelled in these arts, and still more in chess, and an evening with Mr. Dutton was quite a red-letter time with Nuttie. It gave her an indefinable sense of safety and protection; but it was not always to be had, for her friend had many engagements, being one of the active lay church workers, and devoting two regular evenings in each week to Gerard Godfrey's eastern district, where he kept all the accounts, had a model court and evening class, besides hospitably resting tired clergymen and their wives in his pleasant quiet house.

In the spring Mr. Egremont was laid up with the worst rheumatic attack he had yet had, in consequence of yielding to the imperious will of his son, who had

insisted on standing in a bleak corner to see the Life Guards pass by. On this occasion Nuttie did not prove herself the heaven-born nurse that the true heroine ought to be, but was extremely frightened, and altogether dependent on Gregorio, who knew all about the symptoms, and when to send for the doctor and a *garde-malade*. Gregorio always talked French to Nuttie when he felt himself in the ascendant, as he certainly was at present; but he became much less gracious when he heard that Mrs. William Egremont might be expected, declaring that madame would only excite his master, and that her presence was quite unnecessary. Her coming had been volunteered, but it was a great boon to Ursula, who was thus helped out in many perplexities, although Mrs. Egremont was a great deal at her step-son's, and neither lady was of much avail in the sick-room, during the stress of the illness. It was never actually dangerous, but there was great suffering and much excitement, and for four or five days the distress and anxiety were considerable. After this passed off Ursula was surprised to find her company preferred to that of her aunt. She was a better *souffre-douleur*, was less of a restraint, and was besides his regular reader and amanuensis, so that as the force of the attack abated, he kept her a good deal in his room during the latter part of the day, imparting scraps of intelligence, skimming the papers for him, and reading his letters.

There was a lease to be signed, and, as soon as might be, Mr. Bulfinch, the Redcastle solicitor, brought

it up, and had to be entertained at luncheon. While he was waiting in the drawing-room for Mr. Egremont to be made ready for him, he looked with deep interest on the little heir, whom Ursula presently led off to the other end of the room to the hoard of downstair toys; and an elaborate camp was under construction, when by the fireside, the Canoness inquired in a low confidential tone, 'May I ask whether you came about a will?'

'No, Mrs. Egremont. I wish I were. It is only about the lease of Spinneycotes farm.'

'Then there is none?'

'None that I am aware of. None has ever been drawn up by us. Indeed, I was wishing that some influence could be brought to bear which might show the expedience of making some arrangement. Any melancholy event is, I trust, far distant, but contingencies should be provided for.'

'Exactly so. He is recovering now, but these attacks always leave effects on the heart, and at his age, with his habits, no one knows what may happen. Of course it would not make much difference to the boy.'

'No, the Court of Chancery would appoint the most suitable natural guardians.'

'But,' said Mrs. Egremont, 'I am afraid that the personal property when divided would not be much of a provision for *her*.'

'You are right. The investments are unfortunately and disproportionately small.'

‘She ought either to have them all, or there should be a charge on the estate,’ said the Canoness decisively. ‘If possible, he must be made to move.’

‘Oh, don’t!’ cried Nuttie, jumping up from the floor. ‘He mustn’t be upset on any account.’

‘My dear, I had no notion that you heard us!’ exclaimed her aunt. ‘I thought Alwyn was making too much noise with his soldiers.’

‘I beg your pardon,’ said Nuttie, ‘perhaps I should have spoken sooner, but indeed he must not be worried and disturbed,’ she added, somewhat fiercely.

‘Don’t be afraid, my dear,’ said her aunt. ‘Mr. Bulfinch knows that your father is in no condition to have such matters brought before him.’

‘Certainly,’ said the old lawyer politely; ‘and we will trust that Miss Egremont’s prospects may soon come forward on a more auspicious occasion.’

Nuttie could have beaten him, but she was obliged to content herself with such a sweeping charge of her Zulus among Alwyn’s Englishmen, that their general shrieked out in indignation against such a variation of the accustomed programme of all their games.

Nuttie thought she had defended her patient sufficiently, but she found she had been mistaken, for when her aunt had left them, some days later, her father began, ‘We are well quit of her. Those troublesome dictatorial women always get worse when they are left widows—taking upon them to say what their dear husbands would have said, forsooth.’

'Aunt Jane was very kind to me,' said Ursula, not in the least knowing what he was thinking of.

'To you. Ay, I should think so, taking upon her to lecture me about securing a provision for you.'

'Oh! I hoped——'

'What?' he broke in. 'You knew of it! You set her on, I suppose.'

'Oh! no, no, father. She and Mr. Bulfinch began about it, not meaning me to hear—about a will, I mean—and I told them I wasn't going to have you worried, and I thought I had stopped it altogether.'

'Stop a woman bent on her duty? Hein! But you are a good girl, and shall come to no loss when we have to make your marriage settlement.'

'You won't have to do that, father!'

'Hein! What do you keep that poor fellow Clarence Fane dangling in attendance on you for?'

'I don't! I'm sure I don't want him. I would do anything to keep him at a distance!'

'How now! I thought your Grace condescended to him more than to any one else.'

'I don't dislike him unless he has *that* in his head; but as to marrying him! Oh—h—h,' such a note of horror that elicited a little laugh.

'So hot against him, are we? Who is it then? Not the umbrella fellow?'

'Father! how can you?' she cried, with a burning flush of indignation. 'He—why—he! He has always been a sort of uncle, ever since I was a little girl.'

‘Oh yes, adopted uncles are very devout when young ladies rush out to morning prayers at unearthly hours——’

‘Father!’ with her voice trembling, ‘I assure you he doesn’t—I mean he always goes to St. Michael’s, unless he has anything particular to say to me.’

‘Oh yes, I understand,’ and Mr. Egremont indulged in a hearty laugh, which almost drove poor Nuttie beside herself.

‘Indeed—indeed,’ she stammered, in her confusion and suppressed wrath; ‘it is nothing of that sort. He is a regular old bachelor—he always was.’

‘At what age do men become old bachelors? For he seems to me about the age of poor Clarry, whom you seem to view as a bugbear.’

‘I wish you would not think of such things, father; I have not the slightest intention of leaving you and dear little Wynn timer! Nothing should tempt me!’

‘Nothing? Hein! Then you may as well be on your guard, Miss Egremont, or we shall have pleadings that you have encouraged them—church and world—or both, maybe. You pious folk take your little diversions and flirtations just like your poor sisters whom you shake your heads at, never guessing how Gregorio and I have looked out at you and your adopted uncle parading the street.’

‘I wish Gregorio would mind his own business, and not put such things in your head!’ burst out Nuttie.

At which Mr. Egremont laughed longer and louder than ever.

Poor Nuttie! It was terrible discomfiture, not only for the moment, but a notion had been planted in her mind that seemed cruel, almost profane, and yet which would not be dismissed, and made her heart leap with strange bounds at the wild thought, 'Could it be true?' then sink again with shame at her own presumptuous folly in entertaining such a thought for a moment.

Yet whenever she actually encountered Mr. Dutton her habitual comfort and reliance on him revived, and dispelled all the embarrassment which at other times she expected to feel in his presence.

CHAPTER XI.

SPES NON FRACTA.

SUMMER had quite set in before Mr. Egremont was able to go out for a drive, and then he was ordered to Buxton.

Nuttie only once saw her cousins before leaving town, for their little boy fulfilled the nursery superstition by whooping till May; and all intercourse was prohibited, till he had ceased for a whole week to utter a suspicious sound. Mr. Dutton had insisted on the family spending a fortnight at Springfield House for change of air, and it was there that Nuttie was permitted to see them, though the children were still forbidden to meet.

Annaple looked very thin, but rattled as merrily as ever. 'No one could guess,' she said, 'what a delight it was *not* to know what one was to have for dinner?'

'To do more than know, I am afraid,' said Ursula.

'Well, next to the delight of knowing nothing at all about it—and even that is only good for a holiday—

is the delight of seeing a pudding come out smooth and comfortable and unbroken from its basin. "Something attempted, something done," you know. It is quite as good a work of art as a water-coloured drawing.'

'Only not quite so permanent.'

'No; it is only one's first pudding that one wants to embalm in a glass case for being so good as not to leave its better part behind in the basin, or to collapse as soon as it is in the dish.'

'Which my puddings always did in the happy days of old, but then I was always hunted ignominiously out of the kitchen and told I wasted good food,' said Nuttie.

'Yes, and waste is fearful when Mark and Billy have to eat it all the same, like the poor cows with spoilt hay. I wonder whether your old experiences recall the joy of finding trustworthy eggs within your price.'

'Ah, I was not housekeeper. I only remember being in disgrace for grumbling when there was no pudding, because the hens would not lay.'

'Though I heard a woman declaring the other day that there ought to be a machine for them. Oh, the scenes that I encounter when I am marketing! If I only could describe them for *Punch*! I walked home once with our porter's wife, carrying two most brilliant sticks of rhubarb, all carmine stalk and gamboge leaf, and expressing a very natural opinion that the rhubarb tree must be very showy to look at, and curious to know in what kind of fruit the medi—cine grew.'

‘ Oh, Annapple ! do you go yourself in that way ? ’

‘ Mark used to go with me, but, poor old fellow, he has ruinous ideas about prices and quantities, and besides, now he is so hard worked—up and down all day—he wants a little more of his bed in the morning.’

‘ And what do you want ? ’

‘ I never was a sleepy creature, and I get back in time to dress the boy. I generally find him at high-jinks on his father’s bed. It uses up a little superfluous energy before the dressing.’

‘ But surely you have a servant now ? ’

‘ I’ve come to the conclusion that a workman’s wife charing is a better institution. No. 1, a pet of Miss Nugent’s, was a nice creature, but the London air *did* for her at once. No. 2, also from Mickletonwayte, instantly set up a young man, highly respectable, and ready to marry on the spot, as they did, though their united ages don’t amount to thirty-nine. No. 3 was a Cockney, and couldn’t stay because the look-out was so dull ; and No. 4 gossiped with her kind when I thought her safe in the Temple Gardens with Billy, whereby he caught the whooping-cough, and as she also took the liberty of wearing my fur cloak, and was not particular as to accuracy, we parted on short notice ; and I got this woman to come in every day to scrub, help make the bed, etc. It is much less trouble, and the only fault I have to find with her is an absolute incapability of discerning blacks. I believe she thinks I have a monomania against them.’

Still Annaple insisted that she did not work half so hard as her nieces, Muriel and Janet, in their London season, and that her economy was not nearly so trying and difficult as that which Lady Delmar had been practising for years in order to afford them a summer there; nor was her anxiety to make both ends meet by any means equal to her sister's in keeping up appearances, and avoiding detrimentals. The two sisters met occasionally, but Lady Delmar was so compassionate and patronising that Annaple's spirit recoiled in off-hand levity and rattle, and neither regretted the occupation that prevented them from seeing much of one another.

A year passed by, chiefly spent by Mr. Egremont in the pursuit of comparative health, at Buxton, Bagnères, and Biarritz, during which his daughter could do little but attend to him and to little Alwyn. The boy had been enough left to her and nurse during his father's acute illness to have become more amenable. He was an affectionate child, inheriting, with his mother's face, her sweetness and docility of nature, and he was old enough to be a good deal impressed with the fact that he had made poor papa so ill by teasing him to stand in the cold. Mr. Egremont was not at rest without a sight of the child every day, if only for a moment, and the helplessness and suffering had awed the little fellow a good deal. It was touching to see him pause when galloping about the house when he went past the sick-room, and hush his merry voice of his own accord.

And in the journeys, when his father's invalided

state would have made a fractious or wilful child a serious inconvenience, his good temper and contentment were invaluable. He would sit for hours on his sister's lap, listening to whispered oft-told tales, or playing at impromptu quiet games; he could go to sleep anywhere, and the wonderful discoveries he made at each new place were the amusement of all his auditors. Sister was always his playfellow and companion whenever she could be spared from her father, and she had an ever-increasing influence over him which she did her best to raise into principle.

Perhaps she never had a happier moment than when she heard how he had put his hands behind him and steadily refused when Gregorio had offered to regale him at a stall of bonbons forming only a thin crust to liqueurs, which unfortunately he had already been taught to like.

'But I told him sister said I mustn't have them,' said Alwyn. 'And then he made a face and said something in French about you. I know 'twas you, for he said "*sœur*." What was it?'

'Never mind, Wynnie dear. We had much better never know. You were sister's own dear steadfast boy, and you shall kiss mother's picture.'

Nuttie had a beautiful coloured photograph of her mother, finished like a miniature, which had been taken at Nice, in the time of Alice Egremont's most complete and matured beauty. She had taught Alwyn to kiss and greet it every evening before his prayers, and such a kiss was his reward when he had shown any

special act of goodness, for which, as she told him, 'mother would have been pleased with her little son.'

Such another boon was his one Sunday evening at Biarritz, when she found that while she was shut up at dinner with her father he had voluntarily gone to church with nurse instead of playing on the beach with some other English children. 'It was all very long and tiresome,' he said, when asked if he liked it.

'Then why did you go, old man? There was no need to drag you there,' said his father.

'She didn't drag me,' said the boy; 'I walked.'

'You need not have walked then, Master Dignity.'

'Poor nursie couldn't go without me,' said Alwyn, 'and sister says there's a blessing on those that go.'

'A blessing? eh! and what idea does that little head entertain of a blessing?' said Mr. Egremont.

Alwyn lifted his soft brown eyes reverently and said, 'It is something good,' speaking, as he always did, in a baby lisp inimitable here.

'Well?

'And it comes from God.'

'Well, what is it? Can you see it?'

'No'—he looked in perplexity towards Nuttie, who was in agony all the time, lest there should be a scoff that might remain in the child's mind.

'Never mind sister. Can you feel it?'

'Yes;' and the little face lighted with such a reality that the incipient mockery turned into wonder on the next question.

'And how does it feel?'

‘Oh, so nice! It makes Wynn timer glad here,’ and he spread his hands over his breast, and gave a little caper like a kid for very gladness.

‘There!’ said Mr. Egremont, leaning back fairly conquered. ‘Any one might envy Wynn timer! Good-night, my boy, blessing and all. I wonder if one felt like that when one was a little shaver,’ he pursued, as Alwyn went off to his bed.

‘I think I did sometimes,’ said Nuttie, ‘but I never was half as good as Wynn timer!’

‘What?’ exclaimed her father. ‘You! bred up among the saints.’

‘Ah! but I hadn’t the same nature. I never was like—*her*.’

‘Well—’tis very pretty now, and I don’t know how we could stand a young Turk, but you mustn’t make a girl of him.’

‘There’s no fear of that,’ said Nuttie. ‘He is full of spirit. That old bathing woman calls him “*un vrai petit diable d’Anglais*,” he is so venturous.’

Which delighted Mr. Egremont as much as the concession that the boy’s faith was ‘pretty’ delighted Ursula. Indeed, he went a little further, for when she came back from her few minutes at Alwyn’s bedside he proceeded to tell her of the absolute neglect in which his mother, a belle of the Almacks days, had left her nursery. It was the first time he had ever hinted at a shadow of perception that anything in his own life had been amiss, and Ursula could not but feel a dreamy, hopeful wonder whether her sweet little Alwyn could

be the destined means of doing that in which her mother had failed. It was at least enough to quicken those prayers which had been more dutiful than trustful.

And then her hope sank again when she realised that her father's days were spent between the lull of opiate, followed by a certain serenity, then in a period of irritability, each being more or less prolonged, according to health, weather, or entertainment, and closed again by the sedatives in various forms. It relieved her indeed, but she felt it a wickedness to be glad of the calm, and she was aware that the habit was making inroads on her father's powers. Between that and his defect of eyesight, he was often much confused, especially about money matters, and was more and more dependent.

Would that it had been only upon her, but she was constantly certain that Gregorio was taking advantage of his master's helplessness, and keeping it up by all means in his power. Yet what could be done? For the valet was absolutely necessary to his comfort, and yet she sometimes thought her father half in dread of him, and afraid to expostulate about personal neglects, which became more frequent. Things, that would have enraged him from others, were only grumbled and fretted over, when Gregorio caused him real inconvenience by absence or forgetfulness, and made very insufficient apology. It seemed like a bondage; Nuttie thought of her mother's efforts, and blamed herself in vain.

It was during this journey that she heard of good Miss Headworth's death. The old lady's mind had long failed, and the actual present loss to Nuttie was not great; but it seemed to close a long account of gratitude such as she had not thoroughly felt or understood before; and the link with Micklethwayte was severed.

For Mark and Annapple prevailed on Mrs. Egremont to install Miss Nugent as governess to Rosalind and Adela. In that capacity Nuttie hoped to see a good deal of her; but of course was again disappointed, for her father would not hear of returning to Bridgefield. It was draughty, and dull, and desolate, and nothing suited him but London.

CHAPTER XII.

BLACKS IN THE ASCENDANT.

‘Man’s work ends with set of sun,
Woman’s work is never done.’—*Proverb.*

IT was far on in May when Ursula found herself again in the sitting-room over the warehouse. Somehow it had not the dainty well-cared-for air of erst. The pretty table ornaments were out of sight; the glass over the clock was dim, the hands had stopped; some of Annaple’s foes, the blacks, had effected a lodgment on the Parian figures; the chintzes showed wear and wash, almost grime; the carpet’s pattern was worn; a basket full of socks was on the sofa; and on the table a dress, once belonging to Annaple’s trousseau, was laid out, converted into its component parts. The wails of a baby could be heard in the distance, and the first person to appear was Master William, sturdy and happy in spite of wofully darned knees to his stockings.

‘Mother’s coming, if baby will stop crying,’ he said, ‘and lie in her cradle.’

‘Your little sister! What’s her name?’

‘Jane Christian,’ said the boy, with a much more distinct enunciation than Alwyn, though a year older, had yet acquired. ‘She does cry so! She won’t let mother make my new knickies out of her blue gown!’

Thoughts of the suits that Alwyn was discarding came across Nuttie. Could they be offered without offence? She asked, however, ‘Do you remember Alwyn—my Wynn timer?’

‘Wynn timer gave me my horse,’ cried the boy, un-stabling a steed which had seen hard service since the presentation. ‘Where’s Wynn timer?’

‘He is at home. You must come and see him,’ said Nuttie, who had not been allowed to bring him till secure of a clean bill of health. ‘But see, just outside the door, there’s something for Billy.’

She had made her servant bring up the parcels to the passage outside, and Billy was soon hugging a magnificent box of soldiers, wherewith he pranced off to show them to his mother, leaving the doors open, so that Ursula could more decidedly hear the baby’s voice, not a healthy child’s lusty cry, but a poor little feeble wail, interspersed with attempts at consolation. ‘Come, won’t she go to Emily? Oh, Billy-boy, how splendid! I hope you thanked Cousin Ursula. Baby Jenny, now can’t you let any one speak but yourself? Oh! shall I never teach you that “Balow, my babe,” is not “bellow, my babe.” That’s better! Now can’t you let Emily have you, while I go to Cousin Nuttie?’

‘Let me come! Mayn’t I?’ exclaimed Ursula,

invading the room that served as kitchen, where Annaple was trying to hush off the child and make her over to a little twelve years old maid, who stood in waiting, helping Willie meantime to unpack his soldiers, with smothered exclamations of delight.

‘Oh, Nuttie, how good of you! Please to excuse the accompaniment. There never was such a young lady for self-assertion to make up for there being so little of her.’

And Annaple, very thin and tired looking, held up the child, fearfully small and pinched for four months old, to be kissed by Nuttie.

‘Does she always go on like this?’

‘‘Cept when she is asleep,’ said Willie.

‘Poor wee lassie,’ said Annaple; ‘there’s great excuse for her, for the food has not yet been invented that suits her ladyship.’

‘You must come and consult nurse.’

‘And how are you all? I’m glad you are at hand, Nuttie! Is Mr. Egremont better?’

‘As well as ever he is—lame and altogether an invalid,—but he has not had such bad attacks of pain lately.’

‘And his eyes?’

‘About the same. He can write, and tell one card from another, but he can’t read—or rather it hurts him to do so, and he can’t bear a strong light. But, Annaple, how are you? That child is wearing you to a shadow.’

‘Oh! I’m quite well—perfectly. There, I think

she is gone off at last. You had better walk her about a little, Emily; she will break out again if we try to put her in the cradle.'

And having handed over the child with only a very low murmur, Annapple left her combined kitchen and nursery. She flew at the flowers Nuttie had brought like a thirsty person, crying, as she buried her face in them, 'Now for beauty! Now Mark will be refreshed! Ah! here's a pretty pickle for a reception room.'

'Oh, don't put it away! I could help you; I do so like that kind of work. It is so like old times.'

'It must be put away, thank you, for Mark will be coming in. And the saying about the public washing of garments is specially true of one's own husband. Ways and means are worrying to the masculine mind.'

'I thought it was too early for Mark?'

'He has an appointment to keep at Charing Cross or thereabouts, so I made him promise to come in in time to "put a bit in his head," as our Irish char-woman says.'

'Then I can take him. I have the carriage, and I must be at home by half-past twelve. I wish you would come too, Annapple. There's plenty of room. You could show the baby to nurse, and the boys could have a good game. I would send you back in the evening. Mark could come on after his business is done.'

'Thank you, Nuttie, I can't to-day—for a whole heap of domestic reasons; but, if you can get Mark to come, do, it would be so good for him.'

‘How is Mark?’

‘He is well, quite well,’ said Annapple; ‘and so good and patient. But you see, it does take it out of a man when that doleful little noise won’t stop all night! We are both acquiring a form of somnambulism, but when there’s real out-of-door business to be done, it is not like proper sleep.’

‘Or when there’s woman’s indoor business, I am afraid,’ said Nuttie, much concerned at the extreme thinness of Annapple’s face and hands, and the weary look of her large eyes.

‘Oh, one makes that up at odd times!’ she answered brightly. ‘One thing is, this work suits Mark, he feels that he *can* do it, and he gets on well with the men. They asked him to join in their club, and he was so much pleased. He gets up subjects for them, and I am so glad he has such a pleasure and interest to keep him from missing the society he was used to.’

‘It must be very good for them too. Mr. Dutton said he really thought Mark had kept them from going in for a strike.’

‘Besides the glory of the thing,’ said Annapple drawing herself up, ‘Mr. Dobbs thought so too, and raised us ten pounds; which made us able to import that little Bridgfield lassie to hold baby—when—when Miss Jenny will let her. He has some law copying to do besides, but I don’t like that; it burns the candle at both ends, and he does get bad headaches sometimes, and goes on all the same.’

‘You must both come and see my Wyn.’

‘ Ah ! I had never asked after him. I suppose he is as pretty as ever,’ said Annaple, who secretly thought his beauty too girlish compared with her sturdy Billy.

‘ Prettier, I think, as he gets more expression. We can’t persuade ourselves to cut his hair, and it looks so lovely on his sailor suit. And he is so good. I could not have believed a child could be so quiet and considerate on a journey. You should have seen him standing by my father’s knee in the railway carriage, and amusing him with all that was to be seen, and stopping at the least hint that he was chattering too much.’

‘ Billy is wonderfully helpful. Ah ——’ and Annaple’s eyes lighted up as the step that had music in’t came up the stair ; and as Mark came in, Nuttie thought him grown older, his hair thinner, his shoulders rounded, and his office coat shabby, but she saw something in his countenance there had never been before. Ever since she had known him he had worn a certain air of depression, or perhaps more truly of failure and perplexity, which kept before her conscious mind the *Desdichado* on Ivanhoe’s shield, even when he was a gentleman at ease at the luxurious Rectory ; but there was now not only the settled air of a man who had found his vocation, but something of the self-respect and eagerness of one who was doing it well, and feeling himself valued.

‘ Is baby ——’ he began. ‘ Oh, Nuttie ! Are you there ? Mr. Dutton told me you were coming. How is my uncle ?’ And the voice was much brisker than in the days of lawn-tennis.

‘Father, father, look!’ cried the boy.

‘Why, Billy-boy, you are set up! Zouaves and chasseurs! I see where they came from.’

During the mixture of greetings and inquiries, admiration of the flowers, and the exhibition of Billy’s treasures, Annapple glided away, and presently placed before him a tray, daintily benapkinned and set forth with a little cup of soup.

‘Baby is really asleep, and Emily as proud as a Hielandman,’ she said. ‘Now eat this, without more ado, for that good Nuttie is going to set you down at Charing Cross.’

‘This is the way we spoil our husbands, Nuttie,’ said Mark. ‘Refectations served up at every turn.’

‘Only bones! The immortal *pot au feu*,’ said Annapple. ‘And you are to go on after you have interviewed your man of steel, and have tea with Nuttie, and pay your respects to your uncle, like a dutiful nephew.’

‘No, that I can’t, Nannie; I promised Dobbs to go and see a man for him, and I must come back as soon as I can after that.’

He looked—as to figure and air—much more like his old self when he had changed his coat. They fed him, almost against his will, with a few of the forced strawberries Nuttie had brought. Billy pressed on him wonders from a Paris bonbon box, and Annapple fastened a rose and a pink in his button-hole, and came down to the street door with her boy to see him off.

‘What do you think of her?’ was Mark’s first inquiry.

‘Think! As Mr. Dutton said long ago, never was braver lady!’

‘Never was there a truer word! I meant as to her health? As to courage, spirits, and temper, there is no question; I never saw them fail; but are they not almost too much for the frame?’ he asked anxiously.

It echoed Nuttie’s fear, but she tried to frame a cheerful answer. ‘She is very thin, but she seems well.’

‘She never complains, but I am sure her strength is not what it was. She cannot walk out as she did at first. Indeed, she gets no real rest day nor night, and there’s no relieving her!’

‘She says you don’t get much rest either.’

‘More than my share,’ said Mark. ‘The poor little thing never sleeps except in some one’s arms, and if awake, is not content for a moment except in her mother’s.’

‘And that has been going on four months?’

‘Three. Ever since we brought her back from Redcastle. I have nearly determined to move into some suburb when I get a rise at Michaelmas, unless she improves.’

‘Nurse might suggest something.’

‘Or at any rate tell us what to think. We showed her to a doctor, and all he could propose was some kind of food, which was no more successful than the rest. Did you look at her, Nuttie? She is a pretty

little thing when she is quiet, but she dwindles away—at least so it seems to me, though Annaple will not see it, and—and if we are not permitted to keep the little one, I dread what the effect may be on her.'

Nuttie said something about bravery and goodness, thinking in her heart that, if the blow fell, it would be better for all than the perpetual suffering of the poor little sickly being.

'Ah! you don't know what her affections are,' said Mark. 'You did not see her when she lost her mother, and there had been no strain on her powers then. However, I've no business to croak. Many a child gets over troubles of this kind, and, as Annaple says, little Jenny will be all the more to us for what we go through with her.'

The carriage stopped, and Nuttie asked him if it would delay him too long if she executed a commission about her father's glasses. He had plenty of time, but she was delayed longer than she expected, and on her return was surprised to find that he had dropped asleep.

'Ah! that's what comes of a moment's quiet;' he said, smiling.

'Fine quiet in the roar of Ludgate Hill!'

'To a Cockney 'tis as the mill to the miller! I like the full stir and tide,' he added, looking out upon it. 'I never knew what life was before!'

'I should have thought you never knew what hardness and hard work were.'

'That's just it,' he answered, smiling. 'The swing

of it is exhilaration—very different from being a cumberer of the ground.’

‘Oh, Mark, all the privations and anxiety!’

‘The privation! that’s nothing. Indeed I am afraid—yes, I am ashamed to say—it falls more on my dear wife than myself, but if we can only wear through a year or two we shall get a further rise, and my poor Annapple may get out of this drudgery. Please God, she and the little one can stand it for a time, and I think she has a spring within her that will;’ then, as he saw tears in his cousin’s eyes, he added, ‘Don’t be unhappy about it, Nuttie; I have had it in my mind ever so long to tell you that the finding you at Micklethwayte was the best thing that ever happened to me!’

Yes, so far as character went, Ursula could believe that it had been so. He was twice the man he would have been without the incentive to work, and the constant exercise of patience and cheerfulness; but her heart was heavy with apprehension that the weight of the trial might be too heavy. To her eyes the baby’s life seemed extremely doubtful, and Annapple looked so fragile that the increase of her burthens, any saddening of the heart, might destroy her elasticity, and crush her outright; while even Mark seemed to her to be toiling so close within the limits of his powers that a straw might break the camel’s back!

She longed to talk to Mr. Dutton about them, but she found herself doomed to a day that perhaps Annapple would have thought more trying than her harrowed life. She was a little later than she had

intended, and her father had been waiting impatiently to have a note read to him, so he growled at her impatience to run after 'that Scotch girl.' And the note happened to be of an irritating nature; moreover, the cutlets at luncheon were said to be akin to India-rubber, and there was the wrong flavour in the sauce. Ursula let that cook do what she pleased without remonstrance.

Even Alwyn did not afford as much satisfaction as usual, for the boy was in high spirits and wanted to blow a little trumpet, which was more than his father could stand. He was very good when this was silenced, but he then began to rush round the room daring his sister to catch the wild colt as he went by. This had likewise to be stopped, with the murmur that Ursula spoilt the child.

She tried to compose matters by turning out the old toys in the ottoman, but Alwyn had outgrown most of them, and did not care for any except a certain wooden donkey, minus one ear and a leg, which went by the name of Sambo, and had absorbed a good deal of his affection. He had with difficulty been consoled for Sambo being left behind, and now turned over everything with considerable clatter in search of him. Alas! Sambo could nowhere be found in the room, and Alwyn dashed off to inquire of all the household after him. His father meanwhile growled at the child's noise, and went on trying the glasses Nuttie had brought, and pronouncing each pair in turn useless, vowing that it was no use to send her anywhere.

Upon this, back came Alwyn, terribly distressed and indignant, for he had extracted from the housemaid left in charge, who was as cross as she was trustworthy, 'What that old broken thing, Master Egremont? I threw it on the fire! I'd never have thought a young gentleman of your age would have cared for such rubbish as that.'

'You are a wicked cruel woman,' returned Alwyn, with flashing eyes; 'I shall tell papa and sister of you.'

And in he flew, sobbing with grief and wrath for the dear Sambo, feeling as if it had been a live donkey burnt to death, and hiding his face on his sister's breast for consolation.

'Come, come, Wyn,' said his father, who did not brook interruption; 'here's half a sovereign to go and buy a new donkey.'

'It won't be Sambo,' said Alwyn ruefully.

'But you should thank papa,' said Nuttie.

'Thank you, papa,' he said, with quivering lip, 'but I don't want a new one. Oh Sambo, Sambo! burnt!' and he climbed on Nuttie's lap, hid his face against her and cried, but her comfortings were broken off by, 'How can you encourage the child in being so foolish? Have done, Wyn; don't be such a baby! Go out with nurse and buy what you like, but I can't have crying here.'

He tried to stop in sheer amazement, but the ground swell of sob could not be controlled. Nuttie was going to lead him away, and console him with more imaginative sympathy than could be expected

from the maids, but her father sharply called her back. He wanted her himself, and indeed there was no question which was the worse spoilt child. He might idolise Alwyn, but not so as to clash with his own comforts. The glasses being unsuccessful, Nuttie proposed to drive back to Ludgate Hill for him to choose for himself, but he would not hear of going into the heat of the City, and growled at her for thinking of such a thing.

They took an aimless drive instead in the park, and Nuttie was nearly baked while the carriage was stopped for her father to have a long talk over the prospects of the Derby day with one of his most unpleasant associates, who stood leaning over the door on the shady side of the carriage, no one recking how little protection she derived from her small fringed parasol.

She came home tired out, and thankful that her father went to rest in his own room. She climbed to the nursery, thinking to share Alwyn's tea and comfort him, but she found only nurse there. Nurse had a bad foot, and dreaded hot pavement, so she had sent Master Alwyn out with her subordinate, a country girl, to play in Mr. Dutton's garden till it should be cool enough to go and make his purchase, and a message had since arrived that he was going to drink tea there, and Mr. Dutton would take him out.

His sister envied him the green shades, and had just done her best to cool the back drawing-room and rest herself with a book, when Mr. Fane was announced. He talked pleasantly enough, and lingered

and lingered, no doubt intending to be asked to dinner, but she was equally determined to do no such thing. She had heard enough of races for one day, she thought, and at last he took his leave, only just before she dressed for dinner.

‘I thought Fane was here,’ said Mr. Egremont as he came in; no doubt told by Gregorio.

‘He has been, but he is gone.’

‘You didn’t ask him to stay and dine?’

‘I did not know you wished it.’

‘You might have known that I should have liked to see him. I suppose you think your sweet self society enough for any man?’

‘I am sorry——’

‘I’m sick of hearing you are sorry! I believe there’s nothing you like so well as doing an ungracious thing to a friend of mine.’

Nuttie had learnt to hold her tongue on such occasions.

Dinner was nearly over, and her father had been grumbling again at having no one to take a hand at cards with him, when the door opened a little way, and Alwyn’s pretty glowing face looked in. He came to say good-night rather later than usual, and he ran up to his sister with a little bouquet of yellow banksia and forget-me-nots. ‘Mithter Button’—so Alwyn called him—‘sent you this. He said you would like it, ’cause it came from one that grew at Mittlewait. And oh, look, look!’

He was hugging a little ship, which he proudly

exhibited, while his father's brow had darkened at the message. 'Did you buy that?' asked his sister.

'Yes, Mr. Button went with me, and we sailed it. We sailed it by the fountain in Mr. Button's garden. And we made a storm!'

He danced about with glee, and Mr. Egremont observed, 'A dear purchase for ten shillings. Did it cost all that, Wyn?'

'They gave me a big silver half-crown, and I gived that to a little boy what came to speak to Mr. Button, and had his toes through his boots, and he was so glad.'

'Your money is not for beggars, Wyn.'

'The little boy was not a beggar, papa. He came with a newspaper to Mr. Button, and he is so good to his poor sick mother,' said Alwyn. 'See, see, sister!' turning the prow of his small vessel towards her, and showing a word on it in pencil which he required her to spell out. It was Ursula.

'Oh Wynn timer!' she said, duly flattered, 'did Mr. Dutton do that?'

'He held my hand, and I did!' cried Alwyn triumphantly, 'and he will paint it on Saturday. Then it will dry all Sunday, and not come off, so it will be the *Ursula* for ever and always.'

Here nurse claimed her charge; and when the good-nights were over, and a murmur recommenced, Nuttie suggested that if Mr. Dutton was at home perhaps he would come in and make up the game, but she encountered the old humour. 'I'll tell you what, Ursula, I'll not have that umbrella fellow encouraged about

the house, and if that child is to be made the medium of communication, I'll put a stop to it.'

The words were spoken just as Gregorio had entered the room with a handkerchief of his master's. Nuttie, colouring deeply at the insult, met his triumphant eyes, bit her lips, and deigned no word of reply.

An undefined but very slight odour, that told her of opium smoke, pervaded the stairs that night. It was the only refuge from fretfulness; but her heart ached for her father, herself, and most of all for her little brother. And was she to be cut off from her only counsellor?

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LOST HEIR.

‘Seemed to the boy some comrade gay
Led him forth to the woods to play.’—SCOTT.

THOUGH it was the Derby day, Mr. Egremont's racing days were over, and he only took his daughter with him in quest of the spectacles he wanted. When they came back, Nuttie mounted to the nursery, but no little brother met her on the stairs, and she found nurse in deep displeasure with her subordinate.

‘I sent him out with Ellen to play in the garden at Springfield, and swim his ship, where he couldn't come to no harm,’ said nurse; ‘being that my foot is that bad I can't walk the length of the street; and what does the girl do but lets that there Gregorio take the dear child and go—goodness knows where—without her.’

‘I'm sure, ma'am,’ said the girl crying, ‘I would never have done it, but Mr. Gregory said as how 'twas his papa's wish.’

‘What was?’ said Nuttie.

‘That he shouldn’t never go and play at Mr. Dutton’s again,’ said Ellen.

‘I told her she was to take her orders off me, and no one else,’ returned nurse, ‘except, of course, you, Miss Egremont, as has the right.’

‘Quite so; you should have told Mr. Gregorio so, Ellen.’

‘I did, ma’am, but he said those was Mr. Egremont’s orders; and he said,’ cried the girl, unable to withstand the pleasure of repeating something disagreeable, ‘that Mr. Egremont wouldn’t have no messengers between you and a low tradesman fellow, as made umbrellas, and wanted to insinuate himself in here.’

‘That’s quite enough, Ellen; I don’t want to hear any impertinences. Perhaps you did not understand his foreign accent. Did he say where he was going?’

‘I think he said he’d take him to the Serpentine to sail his ship,’ said Ellen, disposed to carry on asseverations of the correctness of her report, but nurse ordered her off the scene, and proceeded, as a confidential servant, ‘The girl had no call to repeat it; but there’s not a doubt of it he did say something of the sort. There’s not one of us but knows he is dead against Mr. Dutton, because he tried to get master to get to sleep without that nasty opium smoke of his.’

There was bitter feud between nurse and valet, and Nuttie could have exchanged with her many a lament, but she contented herself with saying, ‘I wish he would let Master Alwyn alone. It is high time they should come in.’

‘The child will be tired to death, and all dirt! His nice new sailor suit too! Going grubbing about at the Serpentine with no one knows who, as isn’t fit for a young gentleman,’ moaned nurse.

This however, was the worst fear she entertained, and it was with a certain malicious satisfaction that she heard her master’s bell for Gregorio.

Nuttie descended to explain, and whereas the need was not very urgent, and she looked distressed and angered at the valet, her father received her complaint with, ‘Well, the boy is getting too big to be tied for ever to a nursery-maid. It will do him good to go about with a man.’

But as dressing-time came on, and still neither Gregorio nor Alwyn appeared, Mr. Egremont became impatient, and declared that the valet had no business to keep the child out so long; indeed, he would sooner have taken alarm but for Nuttie’s manifest agony of anxiety, starting and rushing to listen at every ring at the bell or sound of wheels near at hand. At last, at eight o’clock, there was a peal of the servants’ bell, and the footman who answered it turned round to the anxious crowd: ‘Mr. Gregory! He just asked if the child was come home, and went off like lightning.’

‘The villain! He’s lost him!’ shrieked nurse, with a wild scream. ‘Run after him, James! Catch him up!’ suggested the butler at the same moment. ‘Make him tell where he saw him last!’

James was not a genius, but the hall boy, an alert young fellow, had already dashed down the steps in

pursuit, and came up with the valet so as to delay him till the other servants stood round, and Gregorio turned back with them, pale, breathless, evidently terribly dismayed and unwilling to face his master, who stood at the top of the steps, white with alarm and wrath.

‘Sir,’ cried Gregorio, with a stammering of mixed languages, ‘I have been searching everywhere! I was going to give notice to the police. *Je ferai tout! Je le trouverai.*’

‘Where did you lose him?’ demanded Mr. Egremont in a hoarse voice, such as Nuttie had never heard.

‘In the Park, near the bridge over the Serpentine. I was speaking for a few moments to a friend. Bah! *Il etait parti. Mais je le trouverai.* Parker, he seeks too. Fear not, sir, I shall find him.’

‘Find him, you scoundrel, or never dare to see me again! I’ve borne with your insolences long, and now you’ve brought them to a height. Go, I say, find my boy!’ exclaimed Mr. Egremont, with a fierce oath and passionate gesture, and Gregorio vanished again.

‘Bring the carriage—no, call a cab;’ commanded Mr. Egremont, snatching up his hat. ‘Who is this Parker?’

The servants hesitated, but the butler said he believed the man to be a friend of Gregorio’s employed at one of the clubs. Nuttie meanwhile begging her father not to go without her, flew upstairs to put on her hat, and coming down at full speed found that Mr.

Dutton, passing by and seeing the open door and the terrified servants on the steps, had turned in to ask what was the matter, and was hearing in no measured terms from Mr. Egremont how the child had been taken away from his nurse and lost in the Park while that scamp Gregorio was chattering to some good-for-nothing friend.

To Nuttie's great relief, Mr. Dutton offered to go with the father to assist in the search, and the coachman, far too anxious and excited to let his master go without him in a cab, contrived to bring up the carriage. Some of the servants were ordered off to the various police offices. Poor nurse, who was nearly distracted, started in a hansom on her own account, persuaded that she should see and recognise traces of her darling at the scene of his loss, and she almost raced the carriage, which was bound for the same spot.

Sluggish natures like Mr. Egremont's can sometimes be roused to great violence, and then pour forth the long pent-up accumulations kept back by indolence and indifference. His only occupation during the rapid drive was to vituperate his valet, the curse of his life, he said. To hear him talk, it would have seemed as if Gregorio had been the tyrant who had kept him in bondage all these years, fully aware of his falsehood, peculation, and other rascality, but as unable to break the yoke as if he had been in truth the slave of anything but his own evil habit and helpless acquiescence.

Would it last if Gregorio made his appearance at

that instant with Alwyn in his hand? Or even, as Mr. Dutton confidently predicted, a policeman might bring the boy home, before many hours were passed. The chief doubt here was that Alwyn's defective pronunciation, which had been rather foolishly encouraged, might make it difficult to understand his mode of saying his own name, or even that of the street, if he knew it perfectly; but the year he had been absent from London had prevented him from acquiring the curious ready local instinct of the true town child, and he had been so much guarded and watched that he was likely to be utterly at a loss when left alone; and Nuttie was wretched at the thought of his terror and loneliness, even while Mr. Dutton told her of speedy recoveries of lost children through kind people or the police.

They found all the officials of the Park already aware and on the alert, and quite certain of the impossibility of nurse's prime dread that the boy had fallen into the water unseen by any one and been drowned. She was even ready to look into every bush, in case he had been frightened and hidden himself; and nothing would satisfy her but to stay making these researches, when her master had decided on endeavouring to find 'Parker' at the club, and to ascertain from him particulars of time and place.

He was found there. The dinner-hour had brought him back, he being a man in authority there, very well dressed and deferential, declaring himself immensely distressed at the occurrence, and at having

accosted Gregorio and attracted his attention. It was about four o'clock, he thought, and he described the exact spot where the little boy had been sailing his vessel fastened to a string. They might have been talking twenty minutes or half an hour when Gregorio missed his charge, and since that time both had been doing all in their power to find him, until half-past seven, when he had to return to his club, and Gregorio went to see whether the child had been taken home.

By this time Mr. Egremont looked so utterly exhausted, that Mr. Dutton availed himself of the hope that the boy might be found safe at home to take him back; but alas! nothing had been heard there.

The poor man was in a restless, unmanageable state of excitement, almost as terrifying to his daughter as the distress that occasioned it. He swallowed a tumblerful of claret, but would not eat nor go to bed; and indeed, Gregorio alone having had the personal charge of him, latterly sleeping in his dressing-room, none of the other servants knew what to do for him. Mr. Dutton agreed with her that it would be better to send for his doctor, as probably he ought to have a sedative, and neither would take the responsibility of giving it; while he himself declared he neither would nor could rest till he had his boy again.

The doctor was dining out, and they had two terrible hours; while Mr. Egremont paced to the windows; threw himself on the sofa; denounced Gregorio; or, for a change, all the system of police

which had made no discovery ; and Ursula for letting the boy be so helpless. Mr. Dutton sometimes diverted his attention for a few minutes, and hoped he would doze, but the least sound brought him to his feet again, and the only congenial occupation was the composition of a description of poor little Alwyn's person and dress, which set Nuttie crying so uncontrollably, that she had to run out of the room.

Dr. Brownlow came at last, and was very kind and helpful, taking the command, and insisting that Mr. Egremont should go to bed, and take the dose which he mixed. Broadbent, the butler, was to take Gregorio's place, but he was a ponderous man, without much tact, and unused to the valet's office. 'I might just as well have a rhinoceros about me,' said Mr. Egremont, in a fit of irritation ; and it ended, Nuttie hardly knew how, in Mr. Dutton's going upstairs to smooth matters. He came down after a time and said : 'I am not satisfied to leave him alone or to Broadbent ; I have his consent to my sleeping in the dressing-room. I am just going home to fetch my things. Let me find you gone when I come back. You will hear no more to-night. Even if he is found, they will keep him till morning.'

'It is of no use ; I can't sleep.'

'Even if you don't, the mere restful position will make you fitter for the morrow. Will you promise me to undress and really go to bed ?'

'Oh yes ! if you say I must,' said Nuttie dreadingly ; following an instinct of obedience.

‘And remember,’ he said, ‘though I do not say it will be so, this may be deliverance from bondage.’

‘But what a terrible deliverance!’

‘Bonds are not burst without something terrible. No; don’t be frightened. Remember there is safe-keeping for that sweet little fellow, wherever he may be.’

‘Oh, Mr. Dutton, if I could pray for him; but the turmoil seems to have driven away all such things! My boy, my boy, where is he now? Who has heard him say his little prayers?’

‘His Heavenly Father has; of that we may be secure. You will feel it in the quiet of your own room. Good-night.’

‘And I shall know you are praying, better than I can,’ murmured Nuttie, as she returned his good-night, and crept up to her chamber.

CHAPTER XIV.

FETTERS RENT.

‘ The gods are just, and of our pleasant sins
Make whips to scourge us.’—*King Lear*.

THERE was no real sleep for Ursula that short summer night. She saw the early dawn, listened to the distant roll of market-carts, and wondered when it would be reasonable to be afoot, and ready to hear, if aught there was to hear. At any hour after seven, surely the finders would have mercy and bring the welcome news. And just before seven she fell asleep, deeply soundly, and never woke till past eight, but that was just enough to revive the power of hope, and give the sense of a new day. But there was nothing to hear—no news. She found Mr. Dutton in the dining-room. He had had to administer another draught to her father, and had left him in a sleep which would probably last for some time. If she would go and sit in the outer room, after her breakfast, he would go out to obtain intelligence.

‘ You must have some breakfast,’ she said, ringing

the bell, and wistfully looking over the blinds; then exclaiming: 'Oh, there's Mark! Has he heard anything?' and out she darted, opening the door before he rang. 'Mark! have you found him?'

'Yes,' he said gravely, looking utterly amazed as she clasped her hands, and seemed ready to fling herself on his neck with joy. 'I came because it will be a great shock to my uncle.'

'Then it is so! Nurse was right,' said Nuttie, turning deadly pale, and standing as if before a firing platoon. 'Tell me, Mark, where did they find him?'

'At the Faringdon Station. I was sent for to identify him.'

'Stay,' said Mr. Dutton, as there was a wild horrified look in Nuttie's eyes. 'Do you mean little Alwyn?'

'Little Alwyn! No, certainly not. What of him?'

'Gregorio managed to lose him in the park yesterday,' put in Mr. Dutton.

'That accounts for it, then,' said Mark. 'No, it was Gregorio himself, poor man. He was knocked down by the engine, and killed on the spot, just by the station, at eleven o'clock last night. Our name was found on him, and I was sent for early this morning. There was no doubt about it, so I came on here at once to let my uncle know, little thinking——'

'Oh, it is dreadful!' cried Nuttie, sinking into a chair. 'Do you remember, my father told him never to see his face again unless he found Alwyn?'

Broadbent came in at the moment with the coffee-pot, and stood suspended, as he was told what had happened, Mark adding the detail: 'He was crossing the line in front of the engine.'

'Yes, sir,' said the butler. 'It is an awful dispensation. No doubt he knew it was all up with him. You may not be aware, sir, of the subject of his conversation in the park. Mr. Parker had just seen a telegram of the result of the Derby, and he had heavy bets on Lady Edina. I am afraid, sir, there can be no doubt that he found a voluntary grave.'

'We will not talk of that. We cannot judge,' said Mark, shuddering. 'I said I would send some one from here to arrange what was to be done after the inquest.'

Broadbent immediately undertook to go, if his master did not require him, and this was thought advisable, as his services were certainly not acceptable to Mr. Egremont. Mark had thought himself likely to be detained and had provided for his absence, and the awe-stricken trio were consulting together over the breakfast-table, eating mechanically, from the very exhaustion of agitation, when the door opened, and Mr. Egremont in his dressing-gown was among them, exclaiming: 'You are keeping it from me.' He had been wakened by the whispers and rushes of the excited maids, had rung his bell in vain, dressed himself as best he could after so many years of dependence, and stumbled downstairs, where, as with his daughter, it was something like a relief to know

that hope was not extinguished in Alwyn's case. But Mr. Egremont was in a very trembling, broken condition, and much overcome by his valet's end after so many years of intimate association. Certainly, if either of the others had so parted with the man, it would have been a horror in the recollection, but he did not seem to dwell on it; and, indeed, attention was distracted by every sound at the door, since each might bring news of the missing child.

One of these tantalising rings proved to be a policeman with poor Gregorio's keys, and a demand for an investigation into any papers he might have left which would show his state of mind. Mr. Egremont was very much annoyed, declaring that he would have no stranger meddle with them, and that he saw no use in such prying. What difference could it make to any living creature? However, when he found there was no help for it, he said he must do it himself. Nuttie offered to help, but was sharply, strongly refused. Mark alone might and should help.

Then Mr. Dutton volunteered to go and explain matters to Mr. Dobbs, so as to get freedom for Mark for at least the remainder of the day. He would call at the police offices and see what was doing in the search, put forward the advertisements, and obtain that the *Serpentine* should be dragged, for he saw that only that measure would remove one great terror from these anxious hearts.

'And,' he said to Mark, 'with your permission, I

will bring back Mrs. Egremont and the children if they will do me the honour to become my guests. She will be a comfort to Miss Egremont, and then you will be at hand in the evening.'

Mark could only be thankful, and presently addressed himself to the investigation, which his uncle insisted should be made in his own presence, though the opiate kept him for the most part dozing in an arm-chair, only rousing up now and then by some noise at the front door, or putting queries, the replies to which startled him more and more, as he grew more wakeful and Mark proceeded.

All, except a few unimportant bills and a betting-book, was locked into a dressing-case that had once belonged to Mr. Egremont, and had tricks of secret drawers that only he could explain. It was full of papers, and they were a strange revelation that Mr. Egremont might well wish to withhold from his daughter. They went very far back, and of course did not come out in order of chronology, nor would Mark have understood them but for exclamations and comments here and there from his uncle.

Everything seemed to be there,—the old passport and certificate to Gregorio Savelli, when he left his Savoyard home to be a waiter at a hotel; a few letters in Italian, probably from his parents, which Mark could not read, but which soon ceased; the counter-signed character with which he had entered General Egremont's service; and then came a note or two signed A. P. E., which Mr. Egremont regarded with great annoyance,

though they only consisted of such phrases as 'Back on Wednesday. Find an excuse,' or in French, '*Envoyez moi la petite boîte !*' '*Que la porte soit ouverte après minuit.*'

'That was the way,' groaned Mr. Egremont. 'The scoundrel! he kept all those to be able to show me up to the General if he chose! I was a young man then, Mark, not the straitlaced lad you've always been. And the General! A bad old dog he was, went far beyond what I ever did, but for all that he had no notion of any one going any way but his own, and wanted to rein me in as tight as if he had been an epitome of all the virtues. And Gregorio seemed a good-natured young fellow then, and made things easy for me, though no doubt he meant to have me in his hands, in case I tried to shake him off.'

Another discovery affected him far more. It was of a letter in Alice's handwriting, addressed to Captain Egremont, in the yacht *Ninon*—*poste restante*, Madeira. He had never seen it, never known of its existence; Gregorio had gone to inquire for the letters, and had suppressed it. Mr. Egremont had wondered how he had become aware of the marriage. His knowledge had from that time been used as a means of enforcing the need of a good understanding with the heir. Mr. Egremont was much moved by the sight of the letter, and its date, from Dieppe, about six months after he had left his young wife there. He made Mark give it to him unread, handled it tenderly, struggled to read the delicate pointed writing to himself, but soon

deferred the attempt, observing, 'There, there, I can't stand it now! But you see, Mark,' he added after an interval, 'I was not altogether the heartless brute you thought me.'

Mark, as he told his wife afterwards, could not help thinking of the old preamble to indictments, 'By the temptation of the devil.'

And by and by, out of a pocket-book bearing the date of the General's death, came a copy of the certificate of the baptism of Ursula Alice, daughter of Alwyn Piercefield and Alice Egremont, together with that address which Miss Headworth had left at Dieppe to gratify Alice's forlorn idea of a possible rescue, and which Gregorio had asseverated to be non-existent.

Doubtless he infinitely preferred his master's wandering bachelor life to the resumption of marriage ties, and thus he had contrived to keep Mr. Egremont from meeting the Houghtons at Florence. At the same time the uncertainty as to Alice's fate had prevented any other marriage. Gregorio had taken care that, if Mr. Egremont had been villain enough to make such an attempt, he should know that his secret could be brought to light.

Compared with all this wickedness, the proofs of fraud and dishonesty were entirely unimportant. Gambling had evidently been a passion with the valet, and speculation had followed, and Mark could have traced out the full tide before the reinstatement of Mrs. Egremont in her home, the gradual ebb during her reign, the diminished restraint under her daughter.

The other servants had formerly been implicated, but, except a young groom and footman, Mark thought the present set quite free from the taint, and was glad to acquit Broadbent. But the last telegrams and the betting-book in the unhappy man's pocket confirmed Parker's evidence that of late he had staked almost madly, and had risked sums far beyond any means he could raise upon the horse which had failed. The bailiff at Bridgefield had, it had long been guessed, played into his hands, but to what an extent Mark only now discovered.

The result was that what he had learnt in the Park had so astounded him that his inattention to the child had not been wonderful. He had—as Parker testified—sought the little fellow vehemently, and had he been successful, he might yet have made some effort, trusting to his master's toleration; but the loss and reproach had made him an absolutely desperate man. Was it blind flight or self-destruction? That he had money about him, having cashed a cheque of his master's, favoured the first idea, and no one would too curiously inquire whether Mr. Egremont was aware of the amount.

It was only too true that, as he had said, Gregorio Savelli had been the curse of his life, having become one of the whips left by pleasant vices, and the breaking of the yoke had been not only at a terrible price, but, to a man in his half-blind and invalid condition, the actual loss of the person on whom he had depended was a privation. Dr. Brownlow, however,

knew of a good man-servant just set at liberty by the death of an invalid master, and promised to send him on trial.

It was a day of agitations and disappointments, a sample of many that were to follow. There was not a sound of a bell that did not make anxious hearts throb. And oh! how many were spent on vain reports, on mere calls of sympathy by acquaintance whom the father and sister could not see, and on notes of inquiry or condolence that Nuttie had to answer.

Annaple came and was a great help and support to her. Poor nurse, oblivious of her bad foot, or perhaps, willing to wreak vengeance on it as the cause of all the mischief, had insisted on continuing her search in the morning under all the thorns and rhododendrons where she thought the dear lamb might have hidden and cried himself to sleep, and at last had been brought home in a cab quite worn out and despairing. But the screaming baby proved to be a much better comforter to her than any amount of reasonable argument. To soothe it, to understand what ailed it, to find suitable food for it, was an occupation which made the suspense less intolerable. The very handling of an infant would have been congenial; and a sickly crying one was only too interesting. Willie was too near her darling's age to be a welcome sight, but he was already a prime pet with the servants at Springfield; and Annaple, secure that her children were in safe and experienced hands, and overflowing with motherly sympathy for the grievous loss, was

ready to devote herself to Nuttie, whether by talk, by letter writing, or by seeing inquiring friends. She did not expect to be of any use to Mr. Egremont, who had always held aloof from and disliked 'the giggling Scotch girl,' but who came drearily wandering at an unexpected time into the room where she was sitting with his daughter, and presently was involved in their conversation. Whether it was the absence of the poor familiar, or that Annaple was no longer a giggling girl, but a brave, cheerful wife and mother, it was certain that he found the same comfort and support in her presence as did Nuttie. When fits of restless misery and despair pressed hardest upon him, it was soon perceived that Annaple's cheerful tact enabled her to deal with him as no one else could do. There was the restraint of courtesy towards her, such as had worn out towards his daughter, and besides her sanguine optimist spirit never became so depressed as did poor Nuttie's. Mark went by day to his work, but came back to dine at his uncle's, hear the reports, and do what he could for him; and meantime Annaple spent the chief part of the day in aiding Nuttie and Mr. Egremont, while her baby really showed signs of improvement in nurse's keeping. And so the days went on, while every endeavour was made to trace the child, but with no result but bitter disappointment. Twice, strayed children, younger than Alwyn—one even a girl—were brought as the lost boy, and the advertisements bore fruit in more than one harassing and heartless correspondence with wretches who professed to be ready to

restore the child, on promises of absolute secrecy, and sums of money sent beforehand, with all sorts of precautions against interference from the police.

The first of these created great excitement, and the pursuit was committed to Mr. Dutton. When it proved abortive, Mr. Egremont's disappointment and anger were great, and he could not be persuaded that all was not the fault of Mr. Dutton's suspicion and precaution in holding back the money, nor could any one persuade him that it was mere imposture. When another ill-written enigmatical letter arrived, he insisted that it was from the same quarter, and made Broadbent conduct the negotiations, with the result that after considerable sums had been paid in circuitous fashions, the butler was directed to a railway arch where the child would be deposited, and where he found a drab-coloured brat of whom he disposed at the nearest police station, after which he came home savagely disgusted.

Nuttie was not much less so at what she felt as a slight to Mr. Dutton as well as at the failure. 'When you are doing so much for us. We deserve that you should do nothing more,' she said with tears shining in her eyes.

'Do not talk in that way,' he answered. 'You know my feeling for the dear little fellow himself, and——'

'Oh yes,' interrupted Nuttie, 'I do trust to that! Nobody—not the most indifferent person, but must long to save him. Yes, I know it was doing you a wicked injustice to fancy that you could take offence

in that way at a father in such trouble. Please forgive me, Mr. Dutton.'

'As if I had anything to forgive. As if there were anything on earth that could come before the endeavour to recover him,' said Mr. Dutton, too much moved for his usual precision of speech.

'Yes; he is *her* child,' said Nuttie, with a trembling tearful smile.

'*Her* child! Yes, and even if he were not, he is *your* brother,' said Mr. Dutton; then hastily gathering himself up, as if he had said too much, he rose to take leave, adding as their hands clasped, 'Remember, as long as I live, you may count upon me.'

'Oh, I know, I know! There's nobody like you, but I don't know what I say in this awful suspense. If I had only seen him lying white and cold and peaceful, it would have been far better than to think of him pining and miserable among wicked people, who would try to bring him up like themselves. Mother's own little boy!'

'It will not be allowed, it will not be allowed,' cried Mr. Dutton. 'God's Providence is still over him.'

'And there are prayers, I know—at our church and Mr. Godfrey's—and all ours, but oh! it takes a great deal of faith to lean on them. I wonder if you would, Annapple, if it were Willy?'

'We will not ask Mrs. Egremont,' said Mr. Dutton, as Annapple made a gesture of something like doubt.

'It is almost as bad,' said she, coming up and putting

her arm round Nuttie. ‘But indeed, Mr. Dutton, she does trust, only it is very, very sore, for her,—as it is for us all.’

‘You are her great comfort,’ said Mr. Dutton, as he shook hands with her.

‘He could hardly help thanking me,’ said Annapple to her husband afterwards. ‘Mr. Egremont may well call him an adopted uncle. I should say he was a good deal more, poor man.’

CHAPTER XV.

THE HULL OF THE 'URSULA.'

TEN days had passed, and Mark and Annapple were thinking that they ought to return to ordinary life, and leave the bereaved ones to endeavour to construct their life afresh under the dreadful wearing uncertainty of their darling's fate. Still they were detained by urgent entreaties from father and daughter, who both dreaded their departure as additional desolation, and as closing the door of hope. And certainly, even this rest was good for Annapple; and her baby, for whom nurse had discovered a better system, had really not cried more for a whole day than 'befitted a rational child,' said the mother, as she walked back to Springfield with her husband in the summer night, after dinner, on the day that Broadbent's negotiations had failed.

'Nurse will break her heart at parting with her,' said Mark. 'I wish we could afford to have her.'

'Afford, indeed! Her wages are about a quarter of your salary, sir! And after all, 'tis not the nurse that guards the child, as we have seen only too plainly.'

'Do you think he is alive, Nan?'

'I begin to think not. He is not so young but that he could make himself known, and those advertisements are so widely spread. I am sure poor Nuttie would be more at rest if she could give up hope.'

'I did not tell you before, Nan, but Dutton was going to-day to look at a poor little unclaimed child's body that had been found in the Thames. He knew him better than I, so he went.'

'He would have come if——' said Annaple.

'Assuredly. He meant to fetch nurse if he had any doubt, but afterwards he was going to his court about his rents. He always does that on Saturday evenings.'

Mr. Dutton himself opened his door to the pair.

'Well,' said Mark.

'Certainly not. The poor child was evidently much younger, and had red hair. But look here,' and he held out a battered something, black with a white stripe. Mark understood nothing, but Annaple exclaimed, 'Is it his ship?'

'Yes, I could swear to it, for see,' and he pointed to some grimed, almost effaced, but still legible capitals, which, however, scarcely any one but himself could have read as *Ursula*. 'I guided his hand to make those the evening before he was lost,' said Mr. Dutton.

'Dear little man! And where did you find it?'

'Where I never thought of doing so! On the bed of a little crippled boy in the next court to mine.'

He is rather a friend of mine, and I turned in to take him some strawberries. I found him hugging this.'

'How did he get it?'

'Our "Liz" brought it to him. Our "Liz" is a very wild specimen, who has spent her life in eluding the school board officer till she is too old for his clutches; but she has a soft spot in her heart for her little brother, and I believe another for Gerard Godfrey. We must be very cautious, and not excite any alarm, or we shall be baffled altogether. I am not sure that I did quite prudently in giving little Alf a fresh boat in exchange for this; but I could not help bringing it home.'

'You did not see the girl?'

'No. Those girls wander long and late on these hot nights, and I do not think I could have got anything out of her. I have been to Gerard Godfrey, and the next step must be left to him.'

'The next question is whether you will tell those poor things at No. 5,' said Mark.

Mr. Dutton hesitated. 'I should have no doubt of giving Miss Egremont the comfort of knowing that there was a possible clue, but if her father insisted on setting on the police, there would be very little more hope of success. I am afraid it will be more prudent to wait till we know what Godfrey says. He hopes to see the girl to-morrow evening at his mission class, but of course she is a very uncertain attendant there. No, I cannot trust myself.'

Annapple was forced to brook withholding the hope from the fainting hearts all the ensuing Sunday, which was a specially trying day, as Nuttie pined for her dear little companion with the pictures, stories, and hymns that he had always enjoyed, and made pretty childish remarks about, such as she began to treasure as memorable.

As soon as he could, early on Monday morning, Mr. Dutton repaired to Gerard Godfrey's lodgings, and found that the young clergyman had succeeded in seeing the girl, and had examined her so as not to put the wild creature on her guard, and make her use the weapons of falsehood towards one who had never been looked on as an ally of the police. It appeared that she had brought home the ship, or rather its hull, from one of the lowest of lodging houses, where she had employment as something between charwoman and errand girl. She had found it on what passed for a bed in its present condition, one morning, when going to make the extremely slight arrangements that the terrible lair, which served as a common bedroom, underwent, and had secreted it as a prize for her little brother.

At first she had been stolid, and affected utter ignorance as to how it got there, but Mr. Godfrey had entreated her as a friend to try to discover; and had with all his heart made a pathetic description of the girl (he durst not say *lady*) who had always been a mother to her little brother, and now had lost him, and was in terrible uncertainty as to his fate. That

came home to Lizzie's feelings, and she let out what she had seen or picked up in the way of gossip,—that the ship had been left behind by its owner, whether boy or girl Liz was uncertain, for it had long fair hair, wore a petticoat, and had been dosed with gin and something else when carried away. They said it had made noise enough when brought there by Funny Frank and Julia. They were performing folk, who had come in after the Derby day to have a spree, and to pick up another kid to do fairies and such like, because the last they had had hurt his back and had to be left in the workhouse. Yes, she had heard tell that they had got the child from Mother Bet, of whom Gerard had a vague idea as one of the horrible hags, who not only beg themselves, but provide outfits for beggars, including infants, to excite compassion. Either she or one of her crew had picked up the child and disposed of his clothes; and then finding him too old and intelligent to be safely used for begging purposes, she had sold or hired him out to these acrobatic performers, who had gone off into that vague and unknown region, the country. Liz had no notion what was their real name, nor where they would go, only that they attended races and fairs; and as soon as the actual pleasure of communicating information was over, she was seized with a panic, implored Mr. Godfrey to make no use of her information, and explained that the people of the house were quite capable of killing her, if they suspected her of betraying any of their transactions. It was impossible to bring any authorities to

bear on the quest; and Mr. Dutton held it wisest only to write a note telling Mr. Egremont that he had obtained evidence that the child was living, and that he was going in pursuit, but thought it safer to say no more at present. He gave the note to Mark at his office. 'I cannot trust myself to see your cousin,' he said. 'I might be tempted to say more than was consistent with Godfrey's honour towards his informant.'

'I think you are right,' said Mark. 'You had better leave me with only indefinite knowledge, for I shall be hard pressed. Do you not go home first?'

'Yes, I go to pack up a few things and fetch Monsieur. A run in the country will do him good, and he may be a valuable auxiliary. I shall find no one at Springfield at this hour.'

'What is your plan?'

'I shall venture so far as to apply to the police for the names of the usual attendants at races and fairs, and for some idea of their ordinary rounds. I have no doubt that these are known at the chief offices. For the rest, I must use my eyes. But tell your cousin that, with God's blessing, I hope to bring him back to her.'

'He will,' said Ursula, when Mark gave her the message, and from that moment she was calmer. She did not fret Mark with questions even as much as Annapple did, she tried to prevent her father from raging at the scant information, and she even endeavoured to employ herself with some of her ordinary occupations, though all the time she kept up the cease-

less watch. 'Mr. Dutton would not have said that without good hope,' she averred, 'and I trust to him.'

Yet when four, five, six, eight, days had past with no tidings, the heart sickness grew almost more than she could bear, though she still answered with spirit when her father again took to abusing the umbrella-fellow for choosing to keep all in his own hands.

Even Annable could not help saying to her husband that a precise, prim, old bachelor was the very last person for a hunt in slums and the like. The very sight of him would put the people on their guard. 'And think of his fine words,' she added. 'I wish I could go! If I started with a shawl over my head, yoked to a barrel-organ, I should have a far better chance than he will. I declare, Mark, if he does not succeed we'll do it. We'll hire an organ, whereon you shall play. Ah! you shake your head. A musical education is not required, and I know I shall do something desperate soon, if that dear little boy is not found.'

CHAPTER XVI.

NUTTIE'S KNIGHT.

‘The night came on and the bairnies grat,
Their minnie aneath the mools heard that.’

‘LYNDHURST, 4th July. — Philip Dutton to Miss Egremont. Found. Waterloo, 6.15.’

‘I knew he would,’ said Nuttie, with a strange quietness, but as she tried to read it to her father her voice choked, and she had to hand it to Annaple. But for the first time in her life she went up and voluntarily kissed her father’s forehead. And perhaps it was for the first time in *his* life that the exclamation broke from him, ‘Thank God!’

Perhaps it was well that the telegram had not come earlier in the day, for Mr. Egremont was very restless, showing himself much shaken in nerves and spirits before the time for driving to the station, which he greatly antedated. Nuttie could hardly keep him in the carriage, and indeed had to persuade him to return thither, when he had once sprung out on the arrival of a wrong train.

And after all, when the train did come, his blue spectacles were directed to the row of doors at the other end, and Nuttie was anxiously trying to save him from being jostled, when a voice said 'Here!' and close beside them stood Mr. Dutton, with a little boy by his side who looked up in her face and said 'Sister!' It was said in a dreamy, almost puzzled way, not with the ecstatic joy Nuttie had figured to herself; and there was something passive in the mode of his hearing his father's 'My boy, my boy!' Instinctively all turned to the harbour of the carriage; Mr. Dutton lifted Alwyn in, and as Nuttie received him, a pang shot across her, as she felt how light, how bony the little frame had become in these three weeks.

'Come in! Come back with us! Tell us all!' said Mr. Egremont, as Mr. Dutton was about to help him in.

'My dog,' said Mr. Dutton, while Alwyn looked up from nestling in Nuttie's lap to say, 'Mithter Button come! And Mothu!'

'We have room for him,' said Mr. Egremont graciously. 'Here, poor fellow.'

'He has the right,' said Mr. Dutton, 'for he was the real finder.'

And Monsieur, curly and shiny, occupied with great dignity the back seat beside his master, while Alwyn, in a silent but dreamy content, as if he only half understood where he was, rested against his sister's bosom with his hands in his father's.

'Come, old chap,' said his father cheerily, 'tell us all about it.'

But Alwyn only shuddered a little, raised his eyelids slightly, and gave a tiny faint smile.

'I think he is very much tired,' said Mr. Dutton. 'There was a good deal to be done to make him presentable this morning. You must forgive me for sacrificing his curls, there was nothing else to be done with them.'

'Ah!' and Nuttie looked again. The boy was in a new, rather coarse, ready-made, sailor suit that hung loosely upon his little limbs, his hair was short, and he was very pale, the delicate rosy flush quite gone, and with it the round outline of the soft cheek; and there were purple marks under the languid eyes. She bent down and kissed him, saying, 'Was Mr. Button nurse to you, Wynnies?'

He smiled again and murmured, 'Mr. Button made me boy again.'

After a question and answer or two as to main facts of place and time of the discovery, Mr. Dutton told his story. 'I did not effect much with my inquiries after the circuses. All I heard of were of too superior an order for kidnapping practices. However I thought the only way would be to haunt fairs and races, and look at their camp-followers. At a place in Hertfordshire I saw a performance advertised with several children as fairies, so I went to see it. I was soon satisfied that Alwyn was not there; but it struck me that I had known the face of the prime hero, a fine handsome supple fellow, who was called in the

programme Herr Adalbert Steinfuggen, or some such name. Well, it seemed that he knew me, for as I struggled out after a considerable interval, I heard myself accosted, "Mr. Dutton! Sir, surely I have the honour of speaking to Mr. Dutton of Micklethwayte?" I assure you he was the very pink of politeness. Do you remember, Miss Egremont, Abel Stone?"

'Oh, Abel Stone! He was a choir boy at Micklethwayte, I remember! He was very handsome, and had a splendid voice; but he was a real monkey for mischief, and nobody could manage him but mother. She was always pleading that he should not be turned out, and at last he ran away.'

'Yes; he went off with a circus, and there he found his vocation, rose and throve, married the prima-donna, and is part owner. He seems very respectable, and was so friendly and affectionate that I ventured to consult him; when, on hearing whom I was seeking, he became warmly interested, and gave me just the information I wanted. He said he had little doubt that Funny Frank was a clown called Brag, with whom he had had words some years back for misusing the children. He said he did not hold with harshness to the little ones in teaching them to do the feats, which certainly were wonderful. If they were frightened, they were nervous and met with accidents; but make much of them, and they thought it all fun, and took a pride and pleasure in their performances. However this Brag, though a clever fellow, could not be hindered from bullying, and at last he went off

with a girl of the troupe and set up on their own account. Stone, or whatever he pleases to call himself, had met them several times, but he spoke of them with great contempt as "low," and they did not frequent the same places as he does. However, he referred to one of his men, and found that they had been at Epsom on the Derby day, and moreover, that there was a report of them having lately narrowly escaped being in a scrape about a child who had been injured. There was no scruple as to advising me where to look for them, or as to the best means of detection. Stone was very indignant, and made me understand that all his young people were either to the manner born, or willingly hired out by their parents. I saw them in private life, and they looked happy and well-fed, but that was no guarantee for Funny Frank. Well, I followed him up without success, trying each place Stone had set down for me, till I came last night to Lyndhurst, a very pretty place in the New Forest, where there is to be a fair to-morrow, beginning this afternoon. Stone advised me to look about before the affair opened, while unpacking and arranging was going on. Well, after all, it was very simple. I strolled out with my dog round the field where the vans and booths were getting into order. There was what I thought a little girl in a faded red petticoat sitting on the steps at the bottom of a yellow van with her head on her hands.'

'That was me,' said Alwyn, lighting up. 'And Mothu came and kissed Fan!'

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Dutton; ‘I verily believe we might have missed one another, but Monsieur ran up to him and, as I was actually whistling him off, I heard a little voice say, “Mothu! Mothu!” and saw they were—well, embracing one another, and then came “Mithter Button, Mithter Button, oh, take me home!”’

Eager caressing hands were held out to Monsieur, who jumped off the seat to receive the pats and laudations lavished on his curly round pate, and had to be reduced to order before Mr. Dutton could answer the question whether he had any further difficulty or danger.

‘I took him up in my arms, and a handsome truculent-looking woman burst out on me, demanding what I was about with her child. To which I answered that she knew very well he was no such thing. Her man came swaggering up, declaring impudently that I had better be off—but I believe he saw that the people who came round would not take his part, for he gave in much more easily than I expected. I explained as loud as I could that this was a gentleman’s son who had been stolen from his nurse in the Park. The man began to protest that they had found him deserted, and taken him with them out of charity, requesting to be paid for his keep. So I thought it better to give them a sovereign at once, so as to have no further trouble, and get him away as fast as I could. The woman came after me, making further demands, but the sight of a policeman in the distance turned her back. I went up to him and

explained. I found he knew all about the loss and the reward, and looked regretfully at my prize. We went back to the hotel, where I set Alwyn to rights as well as I could, sent out for some clothes, such as the place would produce, and which at least, as he says, made a boy of him again. I'm afraid the process was rather trying from such unaccustomed hands, though he was very good, and he has been asleep almost all the way home, and, his senses all as in a dream bound up.'

The heaviness—whether weariness or content, still continued. Alwyn seemed to find it too much trouble to talk, and only gave little smiles, more like his mother than himself. He clung quite desperately to his sister when Mark offered to lift him from the carriage, but nurse was close behind, and it was good to see the little arms stretched out, and the head laid on her shoulder, the hand put up to stroke her cheek, and the lips whispering 'Wyn's own nursie.' The jubilant greeting and triumphant procession with which he was borne upstairs seemed almost to oppress him. He appeared almost as if he was afraid of wakening from a happy dream, and his lively merri-ment seemed all gone; there were only beams of recognition and gladness at 'Wyn's own nursery,' 'Wyn's own pretty cup,' touching it as if to make sure that it was real, and pleased to see the twisted crusts, his special treat.

But he could not eat much of them, and soon laid his head down, as one weary, with the exhaustion of

content; and nurse, who had allowed that Mr. Dutton had, considering all things, done much for the outward restoration of the daintiness of her recovered child, was impatient to give him the hot bath and night's rest that was to bring back the bright joyous Alwyn. So Nuttie only lingered for those evening prayers she had yearned after so sorely. When she held his mother's picture to him to be kissed, he raised his eyes to her and said: 'Will she come to me at night now?'

'Who, my darling?'

'She, mother dear.'

'Here's her picture, dear boy.'

'Not only the picture—she came out of it, when I cried, up on the nasty-smelling bundle in the van all in the dark.'

'She came?'

'Yes, she came, and made it so nice, and hushed me. I wasn't afraid to go to by-by when she came. And she sang. Sister, can't you sing like that?'

'Not here, I'm afraid, dear, dear boy,' she whispered, holding him so tight that he gave a little cry of 'It hurts.' Then came the prayers, not a word forgotten, and the little voice joined in her murmured thanksgiving for bringing him home.

She was much moved and awe-stricken at these words of her little brother; but she had to dress in haste for dinner, listening the while to her maid's rejoins and vituperations of the wretches who had maltreated the child.

When she came down she found no one in the

drawing-room but Mr. Dutton, whom her father had asked to the happiest meal that had perhaps ever been eaten in that house.

She went towards him with winged steps in her white dress: 'Oh! Mr. Dutton, we have not said half enough to you, but we never, never can.'

He gave a curious, trembling half smile, as she held out her hands to him, and said: 'The joy is great in itself,' speaking in a very low voice.

'Oh! I am so glad that you did it,' cried Ursula. 'It would not have been half so sweet to owe it to any one else.'

'Miss Egremont, do you know what you are saying?' he exclaimed.

'Don't call me Miss Egremont! You never used to. Why should you?'

'I have not dared——' he began.

'Dared! Don't you know you always were our own Mr. Dutton—best, wisest friend of all, and now more than ever.'

'Stay,' he said, 'I cannot allow you in your fervour to say such things to me, unaware of the strength of feeling you are stirring within me.'

'You! you! Mr. Dutton!' cried Nuttie, with a moment's recoil. 'You don't mean that you care for *me*.'

'I know it is preposterous——' he began.

'Preposterous! Yes, that you should care one bit for silly, foolish, naughty, self-willed me. Oh, Mr. Dutton, you can't mean it!'

‘Indeed, I would have kept silence, and not disturbed you with my presumption, if——’

‘Hush!’ she cried. ‘Why, it makes me so glad and so proud, I don’t know what to do. I didn’t think anybody was good enough for you—unless it was dear, dear mother—and that it should be me.’

‘It is true,’ he said gravely, ‘my younger days were spent in a vain dream of that angel, then when all that was ended, I thought such things were not for me; but the old feeling has wakened, it seems to me in greater force than ever, though I meant to have kept it in control——’

‘Oh, I am glad you didn’t! It seems as if the world swam round with wonder and happiness,’ and she held his hand as if to steady herself, starting however as Annale opened the door saying, ‘We’ve been sending telegrams with the good news.’

Then an arch light came into her bright eyes, but the others were behind her, and she said no more.

CHAPTER XVII.

FOUND AND TAKEN.

‘The angels of the gateway
Bent softly to the child,
And stretched glad hands to take him
To the kingdom undefiled.’—B. M.

‘COME up and see him,’ said Nuttie, as the dining-room door was shut. ‘I must feast my eyes on him.’

Annaple replied by throwing an arm round her and looking into her eyes, kissing her on each cheek, and then, as they reached the landing in the summer twilight, waltzing round and round that narrow space with her.

‘You ridiculous person!’ said Nuttie. ‘Do you mean that you saw!’

‘Of course I did; I’ve seen ever so long——’

‘Nonsense! That’s impossible——’

‘Impossible to owls and bats perhaps, but to nothing else not to see that there was one sole and single hero in the world to you, and that to him there was one single being in the world; and that being the case——’

‘But, Annaple, you can’t guess what he has always been to me.’

‘Oh! don’t I know?—a sort of Archbishop of Canterbury and George Heriot rolled into one. So much the more reason, my dear, I don’t know when I’ve been so glad in my life than that your good times should be coming.’

‘They are come in knowing this! It is only too wonderful,’ said Nuttie, as they stood together among the plants in the little conservatory on the way up-stairs. ‘I always thought it insulting to him when they teased me about him.’

‘They did, did they?’

‘My father, incited by poor Gregorio. Oh, Annaple! don’t let any one guess till we know how my father will take it. What is it Ellen?’ as the nursery-maid appeared on the stairs.

If you please, ma’am, Mrs. Poole would be glad if you are coming up to the nursery.’

They both hastened up and nurse came out to meet them in the day nursery, making a sign to Ellen to take her place by the cot, and withholding the two ladies. She made them come as far off as possible, and then said that she was not at all satisfied about Master Alwyn. There had been the same drowsiness and disinclination to speak, and when she had undressed and washed him, he had seemed tender all over, and cried out and moaned as if her touch hurt him, especially on one side where, she felt convinced, there was some injury; but when she asked about it

his eyes grew frightened and bewildered, and he only cried in a feeble sort of way, as if sobs gave him pain.

She had soothed him, and he had gone into his own bed with the same gentle languid gladness, but had presently begun moaning, and imploring in his sleep, wakening with screams and entreaties, 'Oh, I'll do it! I'll try!' and she thought him very feverish. Would it not be better that a doctor should see him?

Nurse was always an alarmist, and Nuttie could not help thinking that to wake the child to see a stranger to-night would only add to his terror and distress, while Annaple declared her entire belief that though no doubt the poor little fellow had been cruelly knocked about and bruised, a night's rest would probably restore his bright self, and make all that was past only like a bad dream. There was no judging to-night, and sleep was wonderful reparation to those little beings.

Then however the moans and murmurs began again, and now the awakening cry. They started forward, and as Nuttie came to the cot-side the child threw himself into her bosom with, 'Sister! Sister! It is sister!' but his eyes grew round with terror at sight of Annaple, and clinging tightly to Nuttie he gasped, 'Send her away! don't let her touch me! Fan's not here!'

To tell him she was Cousin Annaple, Billy's mamma, had no effect; he did not seem able to understand, and she could only retire—nurse being thus convinced that to let him see another stranger to-night would only do

further harm. Nuttie and nurse succeeded in reassuring him that he was safe at home and with them, and in hushing him off into what they hoped would be a quiet wholesome sleep in spite of the hot sultry night, on which Annaple laid a good deal of the blame of his restlessness and feverishness.

Nuttie only came down for a short time before the visitors went away; and then she wrote a note to Dr. Brownlow, which Mark promised to leave as he went to the city in the morning, Mr. Egremont, in his present relief, pooh-poohing all fears, and backing up Annaple's belief in the powers of 'tired nature's soft restorer'; but Mr. Dutton looked grave and said that he had remarked the extreme tenderness, but had hoped that much was due to his own inexperience in handling little children. The parting clasp of the hand had a world of meaning in it, and Nuttie openly said that she hoped to tell him after matins at St. Michael's how the boy was. But she could not be there. When she went upstairs at night the half-delirious terrors had returned, and there was another difficult soothing and comforting before the child slept again. Nurse fancied the unwonted presence might disturb him, and insisted on her going to her own room.

When she returned in the morning it was to find that since daylight he had been more quietly asleep; but there was a worn sunken look about his face, and she could not be satisfied to leave him alone while the nurses stirred about and breakfasted.

He awoke smiling and happy; he looked about

and said gladly, 'Wyn at home! Wyn's own nursery,' but he did not want to get up; 'Wyn so tired,' he said, speaking of himself in the baby form that he had for several months discarded, but he said his pretty 'thank you,' and took delight in breakfasting in his cot, though still in a subdued way, and showing great reluctance to move or be touched.

Nuttie was sent for to report of him to his father, who would not hear for a moment of anxiety, declaring that the boy would be quite well if they let him alone, he only wanted rest, and insisting on following out his intention of seeing a police superintendant to demand whether the kidnapping rascals could not be prosecuted.

Neither by Nuttie nor nurse could much be extracted from the poor little fellow himself about his adventures. He could not bear to think of them, and there was a mist of confusion over his mind, partly from weakness, partly, they also thought, from the drugged spirits with which he had been more than once dosed. He dimly remembered missing Gregorio in the park, and that he had tried to find his way home alone, but some one, a big boy, he thought, had said he would show him the way, took hold of his hand, dragged him, he knew not where, into dreadful dirt and stench, and apparently had silenced him with a blow before stripping him. But it was all very indistinct, he could not tell how Mother Bet got hold of him, and the being dressed in the rags of a girl had somehow loosed his hold of his own identity. He did not seem at all certain that the poor little dirty petti-

coated thing who had wakened in a horrible cellar, or in a dark jolting van who had been dubbed Fan, who had been forced by the stick to dance and twist and compelled to drink burning, choking stuff, was the same with Alwyn in his sailor suit or in his white cot.

It was Dr. Brownlow who at once detected that there had been much of this dosing, and drew forth the fact. It had probably been done whenever it was expedient that he should be hidden, or unable to make any appeal to outsiders. Alwyn was quite himself by day, and showed no unreasonable fear or shyness, but he begged not to be touched, and though he tried to be good and manly, could not keep from cries and screams when the doctor examined him.

Then it came out. 'It's where he kicked me.'

'Who?'

'That man—master, she said I must call him. He kicked poor little Fan with his great heavy big boots—'cause Fan would say Wyn's prayers.'

'Who was Fan?' asked the puzzled doctor.

'Himself,' whispered Nuttie. 'Alas! himself!'

'Wyn was Fan,' said Alwyn. 'Fan's gone now!'

'And did the man kick poor little Fan,' repeated the doctor—'here?'

'Oh don't—don't! It hurts so. Master said he would have none of that, and he kicked with his big boot. Oh! Fan couldn't dance one bit after that.'

He could not tell how long ago this had been. He seemed to have lost all reckoning of days, and probably felt as if ages had past in Funny Frank's

van, but Dr. Brownlow thought the injury could not be above two or three days old, and probably it accounted for there having been no more obstructions put in the way of removing the child, since he had ceased to be of use, and the discovery of the injury might have brought the perpetrator into trouble. Indeed, as it was, Mr. Egremont caused the police to be written to, demanding the arrest of the man and woman Brag, but they had already decamped, and were never traced, which was decidedly a relief to those who dreaded all that a prosecution would have involved.

And Dr. Brownlow became very grave over the injury. He said it was a surgical case, and he should like to have another opinion, enjoining that the child should be kept in bed, and as quiet as possible, till he could bring his friend in the afternoon, which was no difficult matter, for Alwyn seemed to have no desire for anything but rest and the sight of his friends and his treasures, which were laid beside him to be gently handled and stroked but not played with. Mothu and Mithter Button were among the friends he craved for, but he showed no desire to see Billy-boy, and it was thought best to keep that young gentleman's rampant strength at a distance.

The chief difficulty was with his father, who declared they were all croaking, and that the boy would be as well as ever to-morrow. He went and sat by the cot, and talked merrily of the pony that Alwyn was to ride, and the yachting they would have in the summer; and the little fellow smiled and was pleased,

but went to sleep in the midst. Then Mr. Egremont went out, taking Annaple with him, because Nuttie would not go till the doctors' visit was over, though he declared that they were certain not to come till long after her return from the drive. He actually went to the dealer's, and had pony after pony paraded before the carriage, choosing a charming toy Shetland at last, subject to its behaviour with the coachman's little boy, while Annaple hopefully agreed with him that Alwyn would be on its back in another week.

He still maintained his opinion, outwardly at least, when he was met on his return by Nuttie with a pale, almost thunderstruck face. Dr. Brownlow had called her from trying to soothe away the fright and suffering of the examination, to break to her that both he and his colleague thought very seriously of the injury and its consequences, and deemed it very doubtful whether the poor little fellow could be pulled through.

Mr. Egremont was again angry, declared that she had misunderstood, and made the worst of it; that Dr. Brownlow was a conceited young ass; that his friend played into his hands; with other amenities of the same kind, to which she listened with mingled irritation and pity for his unreasonableness, and even at the sympathy which he found in Annaple's hopeful nature.

The young mother never dreaded nor expected what she could not bear to think possible, such as the death-warrant of that beautiful child, while Nuttie's nature always expected the worst, and indeed had read the doom in the doctor's eyes and voice rather than in his

words. So Annaple backed Mr. Egremont up when he made his daughter write to desire Dr. Brownlow to call in the first advice in London; and among them they made so sure that this would be effective that they actually raised Nuttie's hopes so as to buoy her through the feverish early hours of the night when the pain was aggravated, the terrors returned, the boy was tormented by his duality with Fan, and the past miseries were acted over again. Even nurse and sister did not suffice, and Mithter Button had to be fetched by Mark before he could feel quite secure that he was Alwyn and not Fan. Indeed, in these light-headed moments, a better notion was gained of what he must have endured than in the day-time, when all seemed put aside or forgotten. After a time he became capable of being soothed by hymns, though still asking why his sister could not sing like that vision of his mother which had comforted him in his previous miseries, and craving for her return. Then at last he fell quietly asleep, and Nuttie was left with a few sustaining words and a pressure from Mr. Dutton's hand.

Alas! the new consultation could only ratify the first opinion. The injury need not have been necessarily fatal, though dangerous to any young child, and here it had been aggravated by previous ill-treatment, and by the doses of spirits that had been forced down, besides which, Alwyn was naturally delicate, and—though the doctors would not say so to father or sister—there were hereditary predispositions that gave him the less chance of battling through.

Yet Mr. Egremont concluded his purchase of the pony, and insisted that Alwyn should be carried to the window to see it; and Alwyn's smile was almost enough to break Nuttie's heart, but his head drooped on nurse's shoulder, he hardly lifted his heavy eyelids, and begged for 'by-by' again. Even Annapple burst into tears at the sight, ran out of the room with her sobs, and never augured recovery again, though still she strove to cheer and while away the poor father's piteous hours by making the most of every sign that the child was happy and not suffering much.

That he would be viewed as a 'pale placid martyr' was his sister's chief comfort. His replies as to the manner of the hurt, as well as his light-headed wanderings, had made it more and more evident that the man Brag's brutality had been excited by his persisting in kneeling down to say his prayers aloud—the only way he knew how to say them. Indeed there was a recurring anxiety night and morning to kneel, which had to be reasoned away, even when he was too weak to make the attempt, and was only appeased by 'Sister' kneeling by his side, holding his hands, and repeating the little prayers with him. It was of his own accord that he added: 'And forgive those people, and make them good.' Annapple burst into tears again and almost scolded when she heard of it. 'Oh dear! oh dear! now I know he won't get well! I'm glad Billy isn't so horribly good! Nuttie, Nuttie, don't! You know I don't mean it. Only I just can't bear it. He is the sweetest little fellow in the world! And oh! the cruelty of it.'

‘Yes,’ said Nuttie in her dreary calmness; ‘he is too sweet and lovely and beautiful and good to be anywhere but safe with mother.’

For it was more apparent that they could not keep him. It did not last long; there were a couple of piteous days of restless pain and distress, and then came the more fatal lull and absence of suffering, a drowsiness in which the little fellow sank gradually away, lying with a strange calm beauty on his face, and smiling feebly when he now and then lifted his eyes to rest them on sister or nurse. His father could not bear the sight. It filled him more with angry compassion than with the tender reverence and hushed awe with which Ursula watched her darling slipping as it were from her hold. So Mr. Egremont wandered wretchedly about the lower rooms, while Mark and Annaple tried their best for him through the long summer evening, darkening into night. By and by Alwyn lifted his hand, turned his head, opened his lips, and whispered, ‘Hark, sister, she is singing.’ The look of exceeding joy beamed more and more over the pinched little face. ‘She’s come again,’ he said; and once more, ‘Come to take Wyn to the dear Lord.’ After that there were very few more long breaths before little Alwyn Egremont’s spirit was gone to that unseen world, and only the fair little frame left with that wondrous look of delighted recognition on the face.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE UMBRELLA MAN.

LITTLE Alwyn was laid to rest beside his mother in a beautiful summer noontide. His father was not in a state to attend the funeral, and was left under the care of Annaple, his own choice among those who offered to stay and minister to him. It was his own wish that his daughter should be to the last with her little brother. He had even said to her that she had been a good sister, and his boy had been very fond of her, and he would not keep her away on any account.

And, with a man's preference for a young and kindly woman, he chose Annaple to be with him rather than Mr. Dutton, remembering likewise that but for him the boy would have died in some workhouse, unknown and unclaimed, or among the wretches who had caused his death. So Nuttie had the comfort of Mr. Dutton's going down with her, as well as Mark, and poor broken-down nurse, but not a word referring to the confession of that happy evening had passed between them during the mournful fortnight which had since elapsed.

May Condamine and her husband had made all as fair and consoling as they could. There were white-robed children to bear the boy from the churchyard gate, choristers sang hymns, the grave was lined with moss and daisies, and white roses decked the little coffin and the mound. There was as much of welcome and even of triumph as befitted the innocent child, whose death had in it the element of testimony to the truth. And Nuttie felt it, or would feel it by and by, when her spirit felt less as if some precious thing had been torn up by the roots—to be safe and waiting for her elsewhere, indeed, but that did not solace the yearning longing for the merry loving child; nor the aching pity for the crushed blighted creature whom she had watched suffering and dying. It was far beyond her power as yet to acquiesce in her aunt's consolation that it was happier for the child himself, than if he was to grow up to temptation from without, and with an unsound constitution, with dangerous hereditary proclivities. She could believe it in faith, nay, she had already experienced the difficulties her father had thrown in her way of dealing with him, she tried to be resigned, but the good sense of the Canoness was too much for her.

It was a day of more haste than suited the ideal of such a time, for Mr. Egremont could not be left for a night; so there was only time for a luncheon, with little jerks of talk, and then for an hour spent in short private interviews. Mrs. Egremont obtained from poor Nurse Poole all the details, and, moreover,

her opinion of Mr. Mark's baby, in whom, it having been born under her auspices, she took a special interest.

Nuttie meantime was pacing the shady walk with her dear old friend Miss Nugent, feeling it strange that her heart did not leap up at the bare presence of one she loved so much, yet conscious of the soothing of her sympathy. And Mary, watching her all through, had been struck with the increased sweetness and nobleness her countenance had acquired during these years of discipline. More of her mother's expression had come than could have been thought possible in features of such a different mould, formed for so much more strength and energy. They had not met since Nuttie had been summoned home to her mother's deathbed, and their time was chiefly spent on reminiscences alike of the old sorrow and the new; but, when the time for parting was nearly come, Mary said affectionately, 'And you, my dear?'

'Oh, I am all right,' said Nuttie, and her eyes shone with a light Mary did not at the moment understand; 'you need not be anxious for me *now*.'

'I suppose that unhappy valet's death makes your task easier,' said Mary.

'I think it will,' said Nuttie. 'Poor man! He was—I can't help saying it—the evil genius of the house. Dear mother knew it, struggled against him, and broke down in the struggle. It seems so strange that what she could not do has been done in such a manner, and at such a price! I wonder whether she knew it when she welcomed her boy!'

‘Her influence will aid you still,’ said Mary, ‘and you have Mr. Dutton to help you too. I was so glad to find he was so near you.’

‘Oh, Mr. Dutton!’ exclaimed Ursula, in a strange tone that sent a thrill through Mary, though she knew not why; but at that moment they were interrupted, very inopportunately, by Mr. Bulfinch, who could not go away without asking Miss Egremont whether she thought her father could see him on business if he came up to town the next day. She thought that such an interview would rouse her father and do him good, advising him to call on the chance.

Mark’s *tête-à-tête* had been with his sister May, to whom he had much to tell of his wife and her gallant patience and energy, and how curious it was that now the incubus that had weighed on his uncle’s household was removed, the prejudice had melted away, and he had grown so fond of her that, next to Ursula, she was his best comforter.

‘I hope that will lead to more,’ said May.

‘I don’t see how,’ said Mark. ‘The more we rely only on a blessing on our own exertions the better.’

‘Even when Annapple works within an inch of her life?’

‘Now that she is on a right tack about the baby, that will be easier. Yes, May, I do feel sometimes that I have brought her down to drudgery and narrowness and want of variety such as was never meant for her, but she will never let me think so. She says that it is living in realities, and that it makes

her happier than toiling after society, or rather after the world, and I do believe it is true! I'm sure it is with me.'

'But such work as yours, Mark.'

'Nonsense, May; I enjoy it. I did not when I was in the Greenleaf firm, with an undeveloped sense that Goodenough was not to be trusted, and we were drifting to the bad, yet too green to understand or hinder it; but this I thoroughly like. What does one want but honest effective work, with some power of dealing with and helping those good fellows, the hands, to see the right and help themselves?'

May sighed. 'And yet, now that poor child is gone, I feel all the more how hard it is that you should be put out of the rights of your name.'

'I never had any rights. It was the bane of my life to be supposed to have them. Nothing but this could have made a man of me.'

'And don't you have regrets for your boy?'

'I don't *think* I have—provided we can give him an education—such as I failed to make proper use of, or Annapple might be luxuriating at Pera at this moment.'

'Well!' said May, pausing as she looked up the vista of trees at the great house; 'I can't bear it to go out of the old name.'

'Names may be taken!'

'You don't mean that there's any chance of——
Oh! not that horrid Mr. Fane?'

'Certainly not.'

‘Oh!’ as a trim black figure appeared walking down the open space. ‘That man!’

‘I am not authorised to tell any one so, May.’

‘Yes, I understand. The wretch, he is taking stock of the place already!’

‘For shame, May, no one has deserved so well of them.’

‘I don’t care, he got you into that horrid concern.’

‘And got me out of it, and found my work for me. I tell you, May, it is the best thing that could possibly happen to your parish, or the estate, or my poor uncle either! And you will soon come to a better mind.’

‘Never, while he is to get into your place! Turn back before he comes within hailing distance.’

Before Mark could do anything towards bringing his sister to a better mind he was seized on by his stepmother to propound a scheme she had hatched, namely that, as a mutual benefit, Nurse Poole should be allowed the consolation of bringing her chief comforter, his little daughter, down with her on the visit Mrs. Egremont had invited her to pay at Redcastle. He was very grateful, though doubtful whether Annaple would accept the offer, for she was missing her children’s company, though they were only at Springfield House, and she had been with them part of every day. And, sad as this month had been, it had been such a rest from sheer physical toil that she had gained almost as much by it as the little one.

There was a general assembly and coffee-drinking in the verandah,—Mr. Condamine, Blanche, and her

two young sisters were all there,—and May had to be duly civil to Mr. Dutton, though he came back with some water-lilies that he had fished out of the lake for Nuttie, and she thought it taking possession. Then the Londoners set forth for the station, and there Mark, having perhaps had a hint from his wife, saw Nuttie and Mr. Dutton safely bestowed by Broadbent in an empty carriage, and then discovered a desire to smoke, and left them to themselves.

They had not been alone together for more than a second since the evening of Alwyn's return, and there was a great shyness between them, which lasted till the first station was past without any irruption of newcomers. Nothing had been said but a few comments on the arrangements and the attendants, but probably both were trying to begin to speak, and at last it was Ursula who crossed over so that her face could not be seen, and said in an odd tone—

‘Mr. Dutton——’

‘Yes,’ and he turned, instantly on the alert.

‘Did you mean it—what I thought you meant that evening?’

‘Can you doubt it?’ he said earnestly. ‘But even then I was surprised into the avowal, and I would have held it back if possible, if I had guessed what was going to happen.’

‘Ah! but then I should not have had that drop of comfort through it all,’ and she laid hold of his hand, which returned the pressure strongly, but he sedulously guarded both words and tone as he said:

‘Listen, Ursula, before you speak again. How dear you must always be to me, I cannot tell you, but when I then spoke, it was with the sense that on every account, I should meet with strong opposition from your father and family. And now your position is altered, so that the unsuitability is doubled. I am not [a young man, remember, and my thoughts must be for you above all, I want you to consider whether, in the present state of affairs, you would not do better to look on what then passed as unsaid, or only as the ebullition of gratitude towards your old friend. Let me go abroad, and give you full opportunity for—for some fresh beginning likely to be fitter for you——’

‘Mr. Dutton, how can you say such horrid things? As if a dukedom would make any difference.’

‘Yes,’ he said, turning towards her. ‘If it is only the old-friend feeling, then it is better dropped, but if your heart is in it, child, then we go on, come what may. It is due to you.’

She raised her face towards him now, and he gave a grave kiss to her forehead. She drew a long breath, and said after a little pause, ‘And now I have something to say. One does think of such things even in these sad times, and you can help me. I am so glad it is you, because I know you will, and be rejoiced to do so. You know when Mark found us out first, dear mother and I always felt that it was a great pity he should not have the estate he had been brought up to expect. I believe dear mother thought it would have been the right thing for me to marry him, but I always

did mean to give it back to him, even when I didn't like him. Well, then, you know it all seemed settled otherwise, but now, it is so lucky you spoke to me while that dear little fellow was with us, because now you will help me to persuade my father that it is the only satisfactory thing to do to let it go in the male line to Mark and his Willy.'

'I see! I see!' said Mr. Dutton eagerly. 'It would be an infinite relief if it could be carried out.'

'I believe my father would like it,' said Nuttie. 'He cares for the name; and now no one prevents it; he is fond of Mark, and still more of Annaple! And you! Oh, Mr. Dutton, if he will only take it in the right way, I think you will make me able to do what it grieved dear mother never to have brought about for my poor father.'

'My whole self is yours to aid you,' he said. 'You know of course that I could not ask you to detach yourself from one to whom you are so necessary. If he will permit us, we will watch over him together as doing *her* work.'

'Thank you,' was all Nuttie's lips could utter, though her hand said much more.

And before they reached London they had arranged something of a plan of action for propitiating Mr. Egremont, and bringing the future prospects to be available so as to save Annaple from being worked to death in the meantime.

CHAPTER XIX.

ANNAPLE'S AMBITION FALLEN.

‘WELL, how did you get on, Annaple?’

‘Oh! very well, poor old man, on the whole, though it made one pity him doubly that he chose to make as if he forgot everything, and you were all gone on a picnic, taking me out for a long drive in the afternoon—where we were least likely to meet any one—that I will say for him.’

‘Forgetting is not the best for him.’

‘As if he could forget! But he was very nice and friendly, and put on his best, most courteous self. I think he looks on me rather as a protector from the solemn Mr. Edsall.’

‘Surely Edsall treats him well. He was excellently recommended. You know I saw his master’s daughter.’

‘Oh! only *too* well. He takes the management of him as if he were three years old, or a lunatic. He simply *will* not be offended any more than if he had to do with a baby.’

‘What should offend him?’

‘That Mr. Egremont greatly resents being allowed nothing but by what Edsall calls medical sanction. He is too blind, you know, to venture to pour out anything for himself, and besides, Edsall has all the drugs under lock and key, and is coolness itself about any amount of oburgations, such as I fancy go on sometimes.’

‘Do you think he will stand it?’

‘Who? Your uncle? Yes, I think he will. This man really makes him more comfortable than poor Gregorio did.’

‘Yes; Nuttie said she was sure that there was neglect, if not bullying latterly. But he must miss Gregorio terribly. They had been together for at least five-and-twenty or thirty years, and had plenty of gossip together.’

‘Whereas the present paternal despotism and appalling dignity and gravity will keep him more dependant on his right congeners.’

‘If they are of the right sort, that’s all.’

‘He has been making me read him a whole heap of letters; indeed, as you know, I have been doing that all along, when he could not get Nuttie. There were some from Mr. Bulfinch. Do you know that bailiff of his must be next door to a swindler?’

‘Bulfinch is coming up to see him to-morrow.’

‘And, Mark, do you know, he has been putting out feelers as if to discover whether we would do—what he asked us to do five years ago.’

‘Would you?’

‘If it were not for the children, and—and sometimes the extreme pinch, I should say it was more like *life* to work yourself up as a City man,’ said Annaple. ‘If you were the Squire, with all his opportunities, it would be a different thing, but there’s no outlet there, and I have often admired the wisdom of the Apocryphal saying, “Make not thyself an underling to a foolish man.”’

‘Well, it is lucky you think so, Nannie, for though Dutton is certainly not a foolish man, he will not want an underling. And what do you say to my mother’s proposal of having poor Poole to stay at Redcastle, and borrowing baby to comfort her till she goes out again.’

‘I hate it,’ said Annaple energetically. ‘It is very horrid, but it is awfully good of the Canoness; and I suppose we shall have to let it come to pass, and miss all that most charming time of babyhood which is coming. But most likely it will quite set the little woman up, and be a real kindness to poor Poole.’

‘If we could only keep her for good.’

‘Yes, and then our children would not be half so much our own. I do want to be away with them in our own quarters. I wonder when Nuttie can spare us, but I should like to see her through the great crisis with her father.’

That crisis was to involve more than Annaple in the least expected. Nuttie found that the momentous confession could not possibly take place before the interview with Mr. Bulfinch, at which her presence was needed to help her father with his papers. The prin-

cial concern was to show the full enormity of the bailiff, and decide upon the steps to be taken, the solicitor being anxious for a prosecution, while a certain tenderness for poor Gregorio's memory, or perhaps for the exposure of his own carelessness, made Mr. Egremont reluctant. There was also a proposal, brought forward with much diffidence from Mr. Condamine's mother, to rent Bridgefield House, but on this, as well as respecting a successor to the bailiff, Mr. Egremont was to give his answer the next day, when Mr. Bulfinch would call again.

Nuttie was thankful for the business that had filled up the hour after luncheon, when Alwyn used to play in the drawing-room and delight his father; but she was feeling desperate to have the crisis over, and resolved to speak when she went out driving with him. It was he, however, who began. 'I sounded Mark's wife yesterday, Ursula. She is a nice little thing enough, and a good wife in her way.'

'A very good wife.'

'Except when she persuaded him to turn up his nose at the agency. D'ye think he would take it now, since he has tasted the sweets of his umbrella business?' then, as Nuttie paused, taken by surprise; 'Five hundred a year and the Home Farm would be better than, what is it, a hundred and fifty and a floor over a warehouse! I don't like to see old Will's son wearing himself out there, and the lad is a good honest lad, with business habits, who would do justice to you after I am gone.'

‘Father,’ said Nuttie, trembling with the effort, ‘I want you to do something better than that. I want you to let Mark take the agency with a view to himself—not me. Let him be as he would have been if he had never hunted us up at Micklethwayte, and put me in his place.’

‘Eh!’ said Mr. Egremont. ‘It is not entailed—worse luck; if it had been, I should not have been bound to dance attendance at the heels of such an old sinner as the General.’

‘No, but it ought to go to the heir male, and keep in the old name. Think—there have been Egremonts at Bridgefield for four hundred years!’

‘Very pretty talk, but how will it be with you, Miss. We shall have Fane, and I don’t know how many more, coming after the scent of Bridgefield now,’ he said with a heavy sigh, ending with a bitter ‘Hang them all!’

‘And welcome,’ said Nuttie, answering the thought rather than the words. ‘Father, I wanted to tell you——’

‘You don’t mean that any one has been after you at such a time as this!’ he cried.

‘It was before—I mean it was the evening when we were all so glad, before we began to be afraid.’

‘The umbrella man! By Jove!’

‘And now,’ went on Nuttie, in spite of the explosion, ‘he would hardly have ventured to go on with it but for this—I mean,’ as her father gave a little laugh of his unpleasant sort, ‘he said it would be the

greatest possible relief, and make it all right for the property to go to the heir male.'

'Hein! You think so, do you? See how it will be when I come to talk to him! A shrewd fellow like that who got out of the Micklethwayte concern just in time. Catch him giving up a place like that, though he may humbug you.'

'Then you will see him, father?'

'If you turn him in on me, I can't help it. Bless me! umbrellas everywhere! And here you mean to turn me over to the mercies of that solemn idiot, Edsall. I should have been better off with poor Gregorio.'

'No, father; Mr. Dutton would not take me from you. We would both try all we could to make you comfortable.'

'Convert the old reprobate? Is that his dodge?'

'Don't, father,' for the sneering tone returned.

'Come now,' he added in a much more fatherly manner, for her voice had struck him. 'You don't mean that a well-looking girl like you, who could have her pick of all the swells in town, can really be smitten with a priggish old retired umbrella-monger like that. Why, he might be your father.'

'He has been getting younger ever since I knew him,' said Nuttie.

'Well. He plays as good a game of whist as any man in England,' muttered Mr. Egremont, leaving his daughter in actual doubt whether he meant this as a recommendation, or as expressing a distrust of him, as

one likely to play his cards to the best advantage. She had to remain in doubt, for they overtook Clarence Fane, who came and spoke to them in a very friendly and solicitous manner, and showed himself willing to accept a lift in the carriage. Mr. Egremont, willing to escape from perplexities as well as to endeavour to drive away if possible the oppression of his grief, invited him in, and he had some gossip to impart, which at first seemed to amuse the hearer after this time of seclusion, but the sick and sore heart soon wearied of it, and long before the drive was over, Mr. Egremont was as much bored as his daughter had been from the first.

When Mr. Fane got out, he paused a moment to hold Ursula's hand in a tender manner, while he told her that he had not ventured to intrude (he had left a card of inquiry every day), but that if ever he could be of the least use in amusing Mr. Egremont, he was at her service, and would give up *any* engagement.

'Hein! my fine fellow! No doubt you would!' said Mr. Egremont, when his daughter had uttered her cold thanks, and they had driven on. 'I see your little game, but it is soon to begin it. We may as well let them know that she is booked before the running begins.'

It was a remarkable intimation of his acceptance of her engagement, but Ursula was contented to take it as such, and be thankful.

Mr. Dutton had his interview as soon as Mr. Egre-

mont had rested after his drive, and the result was satisfactory.

No doubt much was due to the Egremont indolence and want of energy, which always preferred to let things take their course. And now that Gregorio was no longer present to amuse, and take all trouble off his hands, Mr. Egremont could hardly have borne to part with his daughter; and, despite of umbrellas and religion, was not sorry to have a perfectly trustworthy son-in-law in the house, able to play at cards with him, manage his household, and obviate all trouble about suitors for the heiress. Moreover, his better feelings were stirred by gratitude on his poor little son's account, and he knew very well that a more brilliant match for his daughter would not have secured for his old age the care and attention he could rely upon here. He was obliged likewise to believe in the disinterestedness, which disclaimed all desire for the estate, as involving cares and duties for which there had been no training; and he was actually glad to keep the property in the direct line. The old liking for Mark, and sense of the hardship of his exclusion, revived, strengthened now by regard for Annaple; together with the present relief from care obtained by making him manager of the estate.

When once brought to a point, Mr. Egremont was always sudden and impetuous, chiefly for the sake of having it over and being unmolested and at rest again. So that very evening, while Nuttie only ventured on sharing with Annaple the glad tidings that Mr. Dutton

was accepted, and in his marvellous goodness, undertook to make his home with her father, Mark was almost stunned by the news, confirmed to him by Mr. Dutton as well as his uncle, that he was to be acknowledged as heir of Bridgefield Egremont, and in the meantime manage the estate with an income suitable to an eldest son.

Presently he came upstairs by himself, and beckoned to Nuttie, rather to the alarm of his wife.

'Ursula,' he said, and took both her hands, 'I cannot have you do this for me.'

'Can't you, Mark? You can't prevent it, you see. And don't you know it is the beginning of all my happiness?'

'But indeed, I cannot feel it right. It is a strained sense of justice. Come and tell her so, Nannie.'

'What?' said Annaple coming forward.

They both paused a moment, then Nuttie said,

'Only that the estate ought to go in the male line.'

'Oh, is that all?' said Annaple, 'I was afraid Mr. Egremont had a fit!'

'Ah! Don't you see what it means,' said Mark. 'They want it to be as if there were an entail—to begin treating me as an eldest son at once. It is Ursula's doing, putting herself out of the succession.'

'I always hated being an heiress,' said Nuttie. 'It would be more dreadful than ever now. Annaple, do be sensible! Don't you see it is the only right thing to do?'

'Billy!' was the one word Annaple said.

‘Yes, Billy and Jenny and all,’ said Nuttie, ‘before you’ve all died of your horrid place—Oh! you haven’t heard that part of it. Of course Mark will have to go down to Bridgefield and look after the place, and live like a gentleman.’

‘Eight hundred a year,’ murmured Mark, ‘and the house at the Home Farm.’

‘Oh! dear,’ gasped Annapple, ‘I wanted you to be Lord Mayor, and now you’ll only be a stupid old country squire. No, no, Nuttie, it’s—it’s—it’s the sort of thing that one only laughs at because otherwise one would have to do the other thing!’

And she gripped Nuttie tight round the waist, and laid her head on her shoulder, shaking with a few little sobs, which might be one thing or the other.

‘It will save her youth, perhaps her life,’ whispered Mark, lifting Nuttie’s hand to his lips for a moment, and then vanishing, while Annapple recovered enough to say, ‘I’m tougher than that, sir. But little Jenny! Oh, Nuttie, I believe it has come in time. I’ve known all along that one straw more might break the camel’s back. We’ve been very happy, but I am glad it is over before Mark got worn down before his time. Grinding is very wholesome, but one may have too much; and I haven’t Mark’s scruples, Nuttie dear, for I do think the place is more in his line than yours or Mr. Dutton’s.’

‘Yes,’ said Ursula, ‘you see he was always happy there, and I never was.’

The next thing was for Mr. Dutton and Ursula to keep Mr. Egremont up to the point of making his long deferred will; nor did they find this so difficult as they expected, for having once made up his mind, he wished to have the matter concluded, and he gave his instructions to Bulfinch the next day. Of course Mark had to give full notice to his employers; but the allowance was to begin at once, so that Annaple only went back to the warehouse to pack up, since she was to occupy No. 5, while Mr. Egremont and his daughter were going under Mr. Dutton's escort to the baths in Dauphiné, an entirely new resort, free from the associations he dreaded, for he could not yet bear the sight of little Willy—the rival 'boy of Egremont.' But the will was safely signed before he went, to the great relief of Nuttie, who, according to the experience of fiction, could hardly believe his life safe till what she called justice had been done.

After all Mr. Egremont became so dependent on Mr. Dutton, during this journey, that he did not like the separation at its close, and pressed on the marriage even sooner than either of the lovers felt quite reverent towards the recent sorrow. He insisted on Bulfinch having the settlements ready for them on their return, and only let them wait long enough to keep their residence, before there was a very quiet wedding in their parish church, with the cousins for bridesmaids. Then Mark and Annaple took care of Mr. Egremont for the fortnight while Mr. Dutton showed his wife his old haunts in France, returning to Springfield House,

where there was plenty of room for Mr. Egremont to make his home with them.

Said Annaple to Miss Nugent, 'I never saw Nuttie so youthful and bright. She is more like a girl than I ever saw her since the first.'

'Yes,' said Mary, 'she has some one to rest on now.'

Mr. Egremont lived between three and four years more contented and peaceful than he had ever been, though frequently suffering, and sometimes giving way to temper and impatience. But Mr. Dutton understood how to manage on these occasions, and without giving up his own extensive usefulness, could give him such care, attention, and amusement as beguiled his discomforts, and made his daughter's task an easier one.

How far the sluggish enfeebled nature was capable of a touch of better things, or whether his low spirits were repentance, no one could judge. At any rate sneers had ended, and when he was laid beside his wife and boy at Bridgefield, Ursula stood by the grave with a far more tender and hopeful feeling than she could have thought possible when he had rent her away from her old home. She looked up at her husband and said, 'Is not her work done?'

THE END.

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